

The Mercer Boys *on the* Beach Patrol



CAPWELL WYCKOFF

MCI-W

CHS-(115)B

To Sonny from
Helen & Steve.



Only when a rocket sent out its dull glare could he make out anything at all.

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[*The Mercer Boys on the Beach Patrol*]

THE MERCER BOYS ON THE BEACH PATROL

BY CAPWELL WYCKOFF

AUTHOR OF

"The Mercer Boys' Cruise in the Lassie," "The Mercer Boys at Woodcrest," "The Mercer Boys on a Treasure Hunt," "The Mercer Boys' Mystery Case," "The Mercer Boys in Summer Camp."



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THE MERCER BOYS SERIES

STORIES OF MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE
FOR BOYS 12 TO 16 YEARS

By CAPWELL WYCKOFF

THE MERCER BOYS' CRUISE IN THE LASSIE
THE MERCER BOYS AT WOODCREST
THE MERCER BOYS ON A TREASURE HUNT
THE MERCER BOYS' MYSTERY CASE
THE MERCER BOYS ON THE BEACH PATROL
THE MERCER BOYS IN SUMMER CAMP

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THE MERCER BOYS ON THE BEACH PATROL

CHAPTER I.

THE O. D. GIVES THE ALARM

THE Officer of the Day, Cadet Terry Mackson of the third class at Woodcrest Military Institute, was busy in the general office of the main school building. The cadet officer was tall and red-headed, with freckles distributed plentifully over his face and neck, and fine gray eyes, in which the light of mischief generally lurked. At the present moment Cadet Mackson's eyes were serious, for there was nothing particularly humorous in making out the report of the day.

It was nearly half past ten and the three hundred cadets at Woodcrest were asleep. Vigorous drill and healthy exercises, to say nothing of a rigid standard of required studies made these young men fall instantly asleep as soon as the lights were turned

off at the master switch. The only lights in the building were those in the hall and the single one which burned in the office where Terry was making out his report.

Each day several cadets were appointed in the three halls which served as dormitories at Woodcrest to act as officers of the day. Their duty was to inspect each room at the close of the day and see that everything was in soldierly order. That meant every article of clothing in place, clean equipment and spotless quarters. All breaches in neatness and order were honestly reported by the appointed officer of the day, and the offender punished for carelessness. The headmaster, Colonel Morrell, and his officers, believed in teaching the young men in their charge that neatness was a law of a soldier's life.

Terry had two minor breaches to report and he lingered in the office making out his sheet. His tour of inspection had been through Inslee Hall, while other officers had inspected Clinton and Locke Halls. Terry was now in the general office in Locke Hall, the main building of the school. All of the other young officers had gone to bed.

The school was quiet. Not a sound broke the stillness out in the halls and the only sound in the office was the scratching of the cadet's pen. When

he had finished his report he made a final dash, which was his name, and then straightened up.

"There!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "That's done, I'm glad to say. Now little Terry's off to bed."

Before quitting the office he walked to the window, a growing wonder in his mind. Some new sound was in the air, a faint rumbling, roaring sound. It had reached his ears at the moment he placed his pen down, and now he was frankly puzzled. He peered out of the window, but was unable to see anything but the black tops of the trees bordering Lake Blair.

The season, that of late February and early March, had been unusually disagreeable. For the past two weeks it had rained with disgusting regularity. Most of the drill had been held inside and the baseball players were fretting over the fact that the ground was still soggy and impossible. So as Terry looked out against a murky sky he was not at all disappointed to find that he could see nothing.

"Funny what that sound is," he reflected, as he pushed the electric light button and stepped out into the hall.

No sooner had he taken a single step away from the door when the telephone bell inside tinkled loudly and insistently. It was a most unusual thing for the

telephone bell to ring out as late as that in the night, and Terry's impulse was to let it go.

"Might be a wrong number," he reflected.

But the bell rang with alarming persistence, bringing him to a halt half way down the corridor. With a shrug of his shoulders the boy in the gray uniform turned back to the office, switched on the light, and lifted the receiver.

"If I don't, the thing will wake up the whole school," he thought. Aloud he called: "Hello!"

An eager voice, that of a young lady telephone operator, answered him swiftly. "Is this Woodcrest School?" she cried.

"Yes, Woodcrest School," Terry replied. "All the little Woodcresters are under their blankets."

"You are to get out at once!" came the startling statement. "The Ashland dam above Warnersville has broken and the river is coming your way rapidly. Lake Blair will be over its banks very soon!"

Before the astonished Terry could offer any reply the key on the switchboard had been turned off and the operator was warning other institutions in the path of the flood. For just one second the red-headed cadet stood, then he slapped the receiver on the hook with precision.

Straight for the school fire alarm bells sprang the

Officer of the Day. Grasping the handles he pulled them down and the gongs began to clang with a startling sound all over Locke Hall. A second and a third series of controls set off the alarms in Clinton and Inslee. Then, this much having been accomplished, the officer of the day raced out into the hall.

Already the stir of life was heard throughout Locke Hall. The clashing alarm bells gave an uncanny sound that was highly disconcerting. Just as Terry reached the hall the door of Colonel Morrell's room opened and the headmaster, partly dressed, bounded out into the hall. His eye fell on Terry instantly.

"Is there a fire, Mr. Mackson?" demanded the little but active man, his portly figure held rigid and alert.

Terry saluted smartly. "Telephone operator on the district switchboard reports Ashland dam broken and flood heading this way, sir. Her advice is to abandon the school at once."

"Very good, Mr. Mackson," snapped the colonel. "Order the assembly sounded."

With that the colonel hopped back in his room to fully don his uniform and the cadet, for the moment virtually in command of the entire school, looked up the central staircase. Clad only in pajamas Cadet

Howes stood at the top. He was the school bugler.

"Mr. Howes," rang out Terry's voice. "Sound assembly at once!"

Mr. Howes' eyes opened in astonishment but he dashed back into his room for his instrument, appearing a moment later with the bugle. In another second the call for assembly rang out through the building, mystifying the cadets completely.

Terry gave one look at the bugler and chuckled. "Not very inspiring in pajamas, but the bugle sounds authentic," he chuckled, as he opened the front doors.

In one of the front rooms in Locke Hall Don and Jim Mercer had been peacefully sleeping at the time the alarm bells rang out. At the first peal of the bells the two brothers, both of them brown haired, manly looking fellows in their early twenties, popped up in bed instantly. At the same time the lights controlled by the alarm, on the master switch, flooded out in every room in Locke Hall.

"Hello, fire somewhere," shouted Jim Mercer, as he bounded out of bed.

"Yes," nodded his brother Don, now wide awake. "Just throw on your clothes so that we can get to it as soon as possible. It may be only a small fire."

But a moment later something happened that made

the brothers stop their hasty dressing and gasp. The sound of the bugle rang out.

"Good grief!" exclaimed the younger brother. "The bugler is playing assembly!"

"Must be a mistake," Don said.

"If it is, he had better get wise to himself. He'll have the battlions out under full arms if he isn't careful."

"There he goes again," Don cried, as he rapidly buttoned his blouse. "He is still playing assembly. That means full equipment, Jim."

Wondering at the strange situation the Mercer brothers dressed with more care. Jim, who was one of the ranking officers in the school, buckled on his sword, while Don, who was lower in the official scale than his brother, snatched up his gun. Jim was captain of the cavalry unit, while Don was a lieutenant in the infantry. The three highest officers in the school were the captains of the infantry, cavalry and artillery divisions. Under them came the lieutenants. Jim had been brilliant enough to win a captaincy in one of the branches, an honor never before held by a third classman. Terry was no officer at all except, temporarily, an Officer of the Day.

The Mercer brothers and their good-humored

friend Terry had long been chums. They had sailed together on the sloop belonging to the Mercers, and their adventures in capturing a set of marine bandits were fully set forth in the first volume of this series, *THE MERCER BOYS' CRUISE IN THE LASSIE*. From their sailing days the three boys had entered Woodcrest Military Institute, where they had experienced many thrilling adventures in their first year, as related in *THE MERCER BOYS AT WOODCREST*. In the third volume, *THE MERCER BOYS ON A TREASURE HUNT*, the boys had found new scenes and adventures on the plains and in the mountains of Lower California, and in the fourth volume, entitled *THE MERCER BOYS' MYSTERY CASE* the three chums and their school comrades had experienced a test of their wits in solving the mystery attached to a silver cup. It was now but a few weeks after the solving of that mystery that the bugle blew assembly at an unusual hour of the night.

Now fully dressed and with all equipment in hand the two brothers turned out into the hall, to find the place swarming with puzzled young soldiers. Overcoats were thrown on and the cadets fell in ranks just outside of Locke Hall. No one appeared to know just what the unusual proceeding was, for Terry had told no one and the colonel was busy. Cadets

from Clinton and Inslee fell in formation, dazed and apprehensive at the suddenness of the astounding assembly.

The colonel appeared in front of his troops and spoke swiftly. Enough light from the doorways of the main hall streamed out over the assembled battalions to make all objects clear.

"Orders of the day!" boomed the colonel, facing the corps. "The school is to be abandoned at once because of an impending flood. Infantry division will march at once for Portville and higher ground. Cavalry will go ahead and look over the situation existing at the town. Artillery unit to the stables to take off horses and cannon. Is the order clearly understood?"

Captain Hudson of the infantry saluted smartly and replied, "Perfectly, sir." Captain Jim Mercer said the same, and Captain Berry of the artillery followed with the identical statement.

"Attention!" boomed the colonel. "Cavalrymen to the stables, mount and start for Portville, to pass the infantry. Infantry, forward march, taking the road to the town. Artillerymen to the stables."

Instantly all was in motion. The cavalry division marched to the stables and got out the mounts, swinging onto the backs of the horses as soon as the

saddles had been placed. The infantry, already in motion, was heading into Portville, although the cavalry soon passed it.

The artillerymen swarmed to the stables and ran out the half dozen field guns and the horses. The roar of the rushing water could be heard and before the horses could be all hitched the water appeared at the door of the barns and ran in, wetting their feet. While the water rose to their ankles they finished the harnessing and fell into formation.

"Company attention, forward march," ordered Berry, and the artillery rolled out of Woodcrest yard, the horses splashing water at every step. Once on the main road there was only a trickle of water, although they knew that in a short time it would be covered. At the present time Lake Blair was filling up and overflowing, and it would be some time before the water would become deep enough to be dangerous.

The colonel was the last to leave Woodcrest School. He had put out all the lights in the school and had seen to it that all cooks and other hired help was out of the place. There was no time to put out the furnace fires, for the water had begun to seep in at the back cellar windows, and the place was abandoned at once.

Terry sat in his accustomed place on the rear of a gun carriage, jogging along with his own particular gun, "The Gossip" as he had named her. Two automobiles passed them, crowding close to the edge of the road and splashing mud and water on the cadets. At the few farmhouses they passed they could see signs of feverish activity as the families loaded valuables on wagons and prepared to abandon their homes.

"Wonder where this is all going to end?" the red-head speculated. "I noticed that our infantry had the supply wagon with them and that means tents and blankets for us. No knowing how long we'll be camping out, I suppose."

A great many high hills walled the school and community around so there was no real danger. It was simply a question of time and inconvenience more than anything else.

When the artillery division entered Portville they found it a deserted village. The cavalry and infantry had passed through and the inhabitants had made for the higher grounds beyond the railroad. Toward this point the guns, carriages and living beings made their way.

CHAPTER II.

DESOLATION

THE cavalry reached Portville well ahead of the other troops and found that the townspeople had been warned long ago of the approaching flood. The lower portion of the town was deserted and so was the business section except by those who were still loading valuables preparatory to leaving for higher ground. In the section of Portville across the railroad tracks, the residential section, the ground was hilly and therefore safe. Toward this part of the country the people were fleeing, without confusion or panic.

Seeing that there was no necessity for a rush of emergency work the colonel simply put the cavalry to work patrolling the town to make sure that no one was in distress or that no little children had been lost in the rush. When the infantry reached town they were met by water to their ankles, which flowed in from the river, ordinarily a thin stream of languid water which had suddenly shot up into a

boiling, foaming torrent. Breaking step and increasing their speed the infantry battalion marched on and up the hill, leaving the water behind them. On the top of a high hill the captain ordered the ranks broken, the camping equipment spread out, and in the darkness a village of tents sprang up.

When the artillery passed through town the water had risen to the knees of the horses and the wheels churned through water as they proceeded. At one point on a mud road, the foremost gun carriage sunk and refused to go any further.

"Gunnery to the carriage," ordered Captain Berry, briefly.

The gunner on that particular carriage and the others immediately leaped into water to their waists and gave husky shoulders to the wheels. With the horses straining they managed to haul the wheels out of the mud, with a sucking sound and a rush of mud, and then the journey was resumed. When they rumbled over the railroad tracks and began to hit higher ground the water became lower and lower and soon ceased to impede their progress. Before long they saw before them the white tents of the battalions.

The cadets broke ranks and awaited orders, groups hurriedly building fires around which to dry, for all

of them were soaking wet. Before ordering his troops to the tents the colonel went off on his horse and ascertained the state of the refugees, to see if the cadets could be of any real service in housing the homeless. But the residents on the hills had kindly taken in all of the unfortunates, housing them in barns, garages, and their own homes, so the cadets found they could occupy their tents by themselves.

By this time they had all dried out, and realizing that no one had been hurt and that the damage done to the homes of the townspeople would be slight, the young men began to enjoy this emergency outing. Cots had been placed in the same manner as when on an encampment, and the battalions were ordered to bed by bugle. All but the absent cavalry members obeyed at once, and by two o'clock in the morning everything was in perfect order. It is doubtful if some of the cadets went to sleep at once, but they did all go to bed.

Down in the town Jim and his comrades patrolled the streets until the water became so high that the horses had difficulty in making their way. A few stubborn people had insisted upon staying in their homes, and these the cadets let alone. As the water flooded in the downstairs portions of the houses nearest the river the inmates retreated to the upper

floors. No one had been left behind and the cavalrymen made it a point to patrol every street in the town and inquire at the houses where lights showed. In each of these houses the people had determined to stay instead of fleeing, and so the mounted men left them to their own devices. In some cases they helped distracted people load wagons and get a start for the hills.

When Jim had made absolutely sure that everything had been done that would be required by the cavalry he summoned his men to meet at the railroad station by whistle and soon the entire troop was with him. Everyone had a satisfactory report and then they turned the heads of their mounts toward the encampment, the fires of which they could see from where they were gathered.

"I don't think the water will rise any higher," remarked Lieutenant Thompson, riding beside Jim. "You don't think any of the houses will be carried away, do you?"

"No," replied Jim. "A good many of them will get a royal soaking around the cellars and the lower floors, but I guess nothing serious will happen to them. This flood is only the result of a few weeks of heavy rain, and nothing like the big spring floods that they have in the Middle West."

When the cavalry troop reported at camp the colonel met them and received Jim's report. When it had been made the tired boys turned in and were soon asleep. Silence soon fell over the camp and the only sound was that of the wash of the running water in the town below.

At six the bugler aroused the camp and the cadets hastened to dress and leave the tents. A scene of desolation greeted their eyes. The sun had come up, spreading its rays over miles of flooded land, in the midst of which the houses of Portville protruded like sore thumbs. The railroad tracks had completely disappeared, the streets of the business section and the main portion of the town were all under water breast high. This water moved along sluggishly toward the lower valley beyond the hills to the east. Scores of trees rose out of the water close at hand and for miles acres of woodland showed only the taller trees above the waters.

"Well," exclaimed Don, looking across the country. "This is a pretty mess!"

"I'm afraid that we won't get in much more schooling this season," observed Hudson, close beside him.

"Is it as bad as that?" Terry demanded.

"Oh, every bit," replied the infantry captain.

"The lower part of the school must be water logged and the furnaces are surely out of commission. We'll be lucky if we can return to school at all!"

The situation had not struck the majority of the cadets in just that way, but looking at it in that light now they were able to see Hudson's point of view. Abruptly it seemed as though the even tenor of their school lives had been broken off and the future disposition of things in the hands of agencies beyond their control. To some the news was welcome, but most of the young men loved their school sincerely and hated to think that it had really suffered from the unexpected flood.

There was food in the camp, of a sort. The emergency rations, consisting of bread, canned soup and hard biscuits, was the fare which the cooks set before the boys. These rations were kept in the supply wagons at all times, and in the present instance they came in mighty handy.

After the morning meal, eaten out in the bright sunshine of a cold March day, had been dispatched, the cadets waited for orders, which were not long in coming. They were ordered to town to take supplies to the families who had not abandoned their homes. The cadets and the townspeople somehow found a few boats and constructed rafts, and in this manner

they visited the people who had remained in their homes. Some of them were now quite willing to leave their shelter and make for the hills, and to those who still stuck to their houses they took food.

The peak of the flood had passed. The total height reached was six feet, and nothing but small shacks and loose articles had been carried away. A good many chickens had been left homeless and more than one dog lamented or rejoiced as his house was rolled over and over by the flood waters. Objects of value were collected by the people and the cadets during the day. A good many business men wished to go to their places of business and see what harm had been done, and the cadets helped to ferry these men in the boats which were handy. Toward evening, under the leadership of the colonel, the cavalry went back to the school to check up on the amount of damage done there.

They found that any thought of school for at least a month was useless. The cellars of the halls had been flooded, causing the furnaces to explode and the damage would take weeks to repair. The lake was nowhere to be seen, as the water was high above the banks, and the region immediately surrounding the school looked like some inland sea. Even the lower

halls of the building were awash and the drying process would take a long time.

"No more lessons for many a day, gentlemen," remarked the colonel, with a slight smile, to the grouped cavalrymen.

"No, sir, and we're sorry for the damage," replied the captain, Jim.

"We have nothing to complain of," the headmaster returned, quietly. "Others have had misfortune, too."

When they returned to camp it was found that the waters were receding rapidly. A number of small streams and rivers miles away helped to carry off the waters, and at the spot where the dam had broken an emergency dam had been constructed. After one more day of camp life the cadets were ready to go back to the school. Most of the people who had left their homes so suddenly were already back, working at the damage.

The march back to Woodcrest was a hard one. The roads were seas of mud, and the wagons got stuck more than once. The gun carriages sank repeatedly. When the corps finally arrived on the soggy campus they were a wet, bedraggled lot, with shoes oozing mud and uniforms in miserable shape.

When they were dismissed they found things at

the school in a deplorable state. The cellars were still filled with water and there was no heat anywhere in the school. Just before dismissal the orders of the day were read by the lieutenants.

"Members of the cadets corps are ordered to their homes until further notice of the commanding officers," read the lieutenants of the battalions.

To those who did not have enough money for passage home the school treasury advanced the sum. Without loss of time the young men changed into their ordinary clothes, piling the soiled uniforms away for many weeks. Terry, Don and Jim were among the first to finish their work in the cold, dismal rooms.

"Well, that is an unexpected end to the school year," remarked Terry, as he locked the drawers of his wardrobe.

"It certainly is," agreed Don, putting his uniform away carefully. "Now I suppose we'll have to put in a couple of inactive months at home. Too bad, with the baseball season so near at hand."

"Yes," nodded Jim. "Here's hoping we find something interesting to do for the next month or so. Home's a fine place and it will be nice to visit with the folks, but I like to be doing something all the time."

"It will seem funny not to see you fellows for a month or two," said Terry.

"Run down any time, we'll be glad to see you," urged Don.

Before long Worcester School was really deserted. The entire corps of cadets, like Terry and the Morier brothers, were all on the train, bound for their homes to await the reopening of the school when repairs should have been made.

CHAPTER III.

DOUGLAS SAVES THE SITUATION

DON woke up and looked around the familiar room that he and Jim had shared since they were small boys together. At almost the same instant his younger brother opened his eyes, and after a second grinned.

"Hello, old man," Jim greeted. "How does it seem to wake up at home?"

"I was just getting used to it," Don grinned. "Seems funny to wake up here once more, doesn't it? But being home isn't a hardship."

"No, I'm going to enjoy our visit," Jim said, getting up and beginning to dress. "The only thing I hope is that we will have a whole lot to do to keep us busy. We have been so good and busy at Woodcrest that we'll become mighty restless if we have to sit around at home."

The Mercer brothers had arrived at home on the previous day and this was the first morning that they had waked in their old, familiar room. They had

wired ahead that they expected to be home shortly, so their coming was no surprise to their folks, and the unexpected reunion had been one of great happiness. The evening before they had spent quietly at home with father, mother and sister, and their first sleep in the old bedroom had been wholly satisfactory.

Now they were facing their first day, the first of many. After a breakfast with the folks they went down to their workshop and prowled around the boathouse, examining this and that and making vague plans. During the day they went more than once to town and hunted up such of their old friends who were still in town and exchanged recollections with them. Then somehow they rounded out the day and spent another evening at home with their people.

Each day for the first week was about the same. The water was not favorable for sailing or they would surely have gone for a cruise on their fine sloop the *Lassie*, the same little ship they had previously taken their cruise in at the time they had captured the marine bandits. But under the circumstances the only thing they could do was to visit the *Lassie* in her dry dock and look around the hold to see if everything was in place as it should

be. The workshop in the boathouse occupied their time somewhat, but it was soon apparent that the boys were longing for more stirring action.

This was not to be wondered at. In their daily life at Woodcrest they were accustomed to bustling activity. Lessons, drills, gymnasium practise, evening visitation and fun, to say nothing of special events, kept them fairly flying at the school and it was no wonder that they found time rather heavy on their hands at home, notwithstanding the fact that it was a real pleasure to see their mother, father and sister once again. There was some snow while they were home and they took full advantage of it, going coasting and joining with old friends in the sport. They carefully kept any restlessness that they felt to themselves, for their folks were enjoying the visit.

"It can get mighty dull around the old home town early in the spring," Jim commented, when they were making a drawer for a table in the kitchen. They were in the boathouse workshop at the time.

"Yes, you are right," Don agreed. He glanced out of the window. "By the way, it isn't spring yet, by a long shot. This is one of the severest Marchs I ever saw.

Jim had been looking out of the window and now

laid down his plane. "Here comes Sis," he exclaimed. "Wonder what she has on her mind?"

"Must she have something on her mind, to come down here?" muttered Don, busy sawing.

"No, but she looks as though she had," Jim replied, and opened the door for his sister.

"Give the pass word," greeted Jim. "This is the sanctuary of men, and men alone!"

"That's funny!" smiled Margy. "Where are there any men around? All I can see is you two little boys!"

"My hopes and aspirations are gone, under that crusher," grinned Jim. "What have you on your mind, little one?"

"There is a visitor waiting for you up at the house, big one!" retorted the sister. "A young man by the name of Harry Douglas."

"Doug!" exclaimed the boys, in unison. "What does he want?"

Margy chuckled. "Why, he didn't say that he wanted anything, in particular. He asked for you two, that is all."

Hastily throwing aside their tools and overalls the two brothers joined Margy and hurried up to the house. Harry Douglas was a cadet in their own class at Woodcrest, and a close friend of theirs.

They had all been concerned in solving the mystery of the missing 1913 class trophy and were devoted friends.

They found Douglas waiting for them in the parlor, where he was talking with Mrs. Mercer. He was a tall, light-haired fellow, with deep blue eyes and a pleasant smile. When the boys came into the parlor he jumped up, extending his hand.

"Hello, you fellows," he greeted. "I'll bet you are surprised to see me, eh?"

"In one sense, yes," admitted Don, as he shook hands. "But you had our standing invitation to visit at any time and I see you have taken it seriously."

"Yes, I have. How are you, Jimmie boy?"

They shook hands all around. Then Douglas chuckled and looked at Mrs. Mercer. "You might ask your mother why I came," he said.

Mrs. Mercer raised her hands in pretended protest. "My goodness, every time you two boys come home some kind-hearted soul comes along and wants to take you right away again!" she said.

"Oh, yes?" cried Don, eagerly. "Where?"

"Listen to that!" accused Mrs. Mercer. "They are just tickled to death to leave us again, Margy."

"Now Mother, you know that isn't so," protested

Jim. "We just jumped at the prospect of going somewhere and having something to do, that is all."

"Yes, that is all," agreed Mrs. Mercer, grimly. She got up. "Come on Margy, we'll let the boys talk in peace."

When the two ladies had departed the three boys sat down and looked at each other. Douglas appeared to enjoy the situation, and said nothing.

"Well, out with it," commanded Jim, impatiently. "What is on your chest?"

"Maybe a mustard plaster," grinned Douglas.

"And you came all the way down here to have us pull it off for you," smiled Don.

"No, I came down here to fetch you two fellows home with me," returned Douglas.

"Home," repeated Don, musingly. "Let's see, that is somewhere down in New England, isn't it?"

"You talk as though New England was a long way off," retorted Douglas. "You are living in New England yourself. Maine is quite near New England, you know!"

"Yes, it is quite near," said Jim, dryly. "Say, don't you live near a coast guard station?"

"I live very close to one," Douglas returned. "My father is captain of the Daggerpoint Rock Station, on the stormy coast of Massachusetts. I live with

my aunt in a small place right beside the station, and in the last week I have looked in on some dandy rescues by the life-saving men. I thought that you fellows would like to come down for a couple of weeks and see some of the work at close hand."

"Would we!" cried Don. "We surely would! Do you mean that, Doug?"

"I surely do," the cadet friend said. "We have plenty of room at my aunt Laura's and I asked her if she could put up three more. She said she could and would, so I reserved the rooms and came on down for you."

"Why three rooms?" questioned Jim. "Did you expect to entertain fat men?"

"I didn't say three rooms. I said room for three more, beside myself."

"Who are the three others?" Don asked.

"I stopped off at Beverley on the way down," replied Douglas.

"To ask Terry along?" inquired the brothers, eagerly.

"Yes, and he said he'd come. What would the Mercer brothers do without their red-headed companion? I've never seen you separated, and I thought you'd be glad to have him along. Of course, if you'd rather not——"

"Who said we'd rather not?" demanded Jim, indignantly. "Why, we've only been absent from that red-topped angel a week, but we miss him sorely. I'd like to grab him by the hair right this minute!"

"You'll have plenty of opportunity to do that, for Terry is coming along," Douglas assured them. "Well, as I was saying, I've seen a few fine rescues pulled off in the past week and enjoyed them tremendously. I was pretty lonesome down there and I began to wonder who I could invite down for a few weeks to share my home life with me. It came to me that you fellows would enjoy seeing the work at the life-saving station and so I came to ask you."

"We're mighty glad that you did," approved Don. "We were running out of excitement around here and were just wondering what to do with ourselves for the remaining weeks before we go back to Woodcrest. So we'll see some real life-saving at close range, will we?"

"You surely will. Dad will let us hang around the station and watch them work, though we won't be able to do much of anything in the actual work. Government regulations keep most curious folks away from the place, especially when the rescue work is going on, but we can be unofficial spectators."

"All my life I've wanted to be an unofficial spec-

tator!" grinned Jim. "So the place is named Daggerpoint Rock Station, is it?"

"Yes, because there is a long splinter of rock there which is just like the point of a dagger, and hence the name. At the same time there are a few hidden reefs and shoals, and more than one unlucky schooner runs aground in the winter storms. Pretty soon the springtime will be at hand and there will be no more wrecks, but by the looks of things there will be a few more blows and we may be able to see something that will interest us."

"Oh, of course we will," said Don, confidently. "Not that I want anyone to run aground for our benefit, but I suppose it does happen."

"Yes, it does. From November until April Dad and his crew of twelve are tremendously busy. Daggerpoint Rock is an old station but very active, and we'll get a good insight of the hard work the life-saving crews do. So you'll come along, I take it?"

"You won't have to ask us twice," affirmed Jim. "How did Mother seem to take it, when you told her?"

"Very well," Douglas replied. "She said that it was a real pleasure to have you home but that you were getting restless for something active to do.

I guess we'll find plenty to keep us busy at the station."

The afternoon passed while they talked and Douglas was invited to stay at the house until the following day, when they planned to start, providing their father had no real objections. Mr. Mercer had not. He realized that the boys were looking for real action, and outside of a kindly warning to keep out of trouble, he had nothing further to say.

A wire was sent to Terry, telling him to meet them at Beverley and then Douglas helped the boys to pack their bags for the trip. There was an extra bed in their room and the boy spent the night in the same room with Don and Jim. On the following morning they enjoyed a hearty breakfast, and when they had said goodbye all around they went to the station and were soon on the train, bound for Massachusetts.

"Now, as soon as we pick up Redhead, we'll be all set," announced Douglas, as they looked out of the window.

"Yes," nodded Don. "I hope we'll have some real adventures, this trip. But I guess there isn't much chance of that. All we'll be doing is looking on."

Don spoke innocently enough. None of them could see ahead to the adventures that were awaiting them on the stormy New England coast.

CHAPTER IV.

AT DAGGERPOINT ROCK

AT Beverley station a tall boy was standing and whistling as the train drew up. Beside him was a suitcase, and as he saw the boys from Bridgewater wave to him from a window Terry picked the suitcase up and boarded the train, making his way to the car in which the three chums sat.

"Greetings, gentlemen, and you also, Jim," grinned the red-head, as he stowed his suitcase in the overhead rack. "Is there room for me to sit down?"

"Over there beside Doug," replied Jim. "Being a gentleman, you won't want to sit alongside me!"

"No, of course not!" agreed Terry, blandly. He dropped in the seat beside Douglas and they all shook hands enthusiastically.

"Boy, you were a life-saver yourself," confided Terry, to Douglas. "I was living a mighty dull life before you showed up. The only excitement I was having was my bi-weekly trip to the movies, to

see a serial. The last time I saw it the lady was on a plank, tied there by the villain, moving slowly but surely toward the whirling buzz saw. It appeared that nothing could save her, although the hero was dashing madly through the night to her rescue. I will wonder and wonder if she will be saved in time!"

"If my recollection of serials runs true," laughed Don. "The hero will rush into the mill at the last moment and turn off the power just as the saw is cutting into her dress."

"Maybe!" admitted Terry. "But you never can tell. Something may go wrong and the lady be cut in half. How I would hate to miss that!"

"When you get back to town ask your friends how it turned out," smiled Douglas. "I think you'll find the lady well and whole, married happily to the hero."

"Now and then, in the moving pictures, such things do happen!" grinned Terry. "Well, here we are once more, I and the Mercer brothers! How I have missed their handsome, manly faces!"

"We return the compliment," said Jim, gravely. "Both Don and I felt that we should go mad if we didn't see that kindly, intelligent face of yours soon. Don, do you remember that nice old collie dog we used to have?"

"What have I or my face to do with that nice old collie dog of yours?" inquired Terry, suspiciously.

Jim opened his eyes wide with pretended astonishment. "Why, Terry, who connected you with the collie? The dog had a nice face, too!"

"That's what I thought, or something like that. Well, judging by the tone used the poor doggie is past and gone, so if you want to remember him, you just look at me."

Talking and joking in a light hearted manner the four friends passed the time in their journey and finally alighted at the town of Marietta, the nearest point to the life-saving station. At this place they hired a wagon to take them to the house in which Douglas lived with his relatives, and before long they arrived at the little white house on the top of the sand dunes, overlooking the broad Atlantic. Nestled below the hills of sand they saw the coast guard station.

At the modest little house they met Douglas' relatives. There was Mrs. Hazlett and a very old lady by that same name who was her mother, and incidently Douglas' grandmother on his mother's side. A young girl of eighteen, Martha Hazlett, was a cousin to Harry, and these three women made up the family, with the exception of Captain Douglas,

who spent all of his time, or nearly all of it, at the station. These three women made the boys feel right at home, and after exchanging greetings they went to a large room on the second floor and stowed away their luggage.

"Nice big room," commented Don, as they unpacked. "With two big beds, we can all sleep in the one place."

"Yes, you and Jim can sleep together and I'll manage to get along somehow with this red-topped boy. Does he snore?"

"Quite gently," replied Jim, instantly. "Pretty much as though he is a bit ashamed of it, but just can't resist the temptation!"

"The fellow that snores will be put out on the beach to sleep," promised Douglas, grimly. "Well, shall we go down and look the station over?"

Nothing could be more agreeable to the boys and they hurried down to the open beach, well wrapped up in their heaviest clothing, for the March day was raw and cold. The little home in which Douglas lived was situated on a slight hill and from its simple front porch a fine view could be had of the surrounding country and the tumbling, uneasy ocean. Next to the little property was a big estate, with a splendid house far back from the beach, the home of the Odell

family. Some five hundred yards from the house the beach and the ocean formed a long front yard for the Hazlett property, and off to the left was the station.

"Perhaps we can persuade Dad to let us make a trip or two with the beach patrol," Douglas observed, as they started for the station.

"What is the beach patrol?" asked Terry.

"On foggy nights, when the ocean can't be watched from the tower, the men have to make a regular patrol along the beach, peering into the fog and listening for signals of distress," replied Douglas. He stopped and pointed far down the beach. "Do you see that small shack down there?"

"Yes," the others answered.

"That is what is called the halfway house. It is a mile from here and almost a mile from the next station, the Bayberry Hill Station. The patrolman walks to that shack at a certain hour, where he meets a man from Bayberry Station. A telephone call is put in to the home station by each man, they rest for ten minutes, and then make the return patrol. That finishes one man's work, and another makes the second patrol, and so on."

"Not much to that," said Jim, lightly.

"That's what you think," returned Douglas, with a slight smile. "But you should make that trip on

a nice winter night, with a howling wind blowing a sixty-mile gale and the sand stinging your face like whips! By the time you returned and fell exhausted into your bed you would know you had done something."

"Now that you put it just that way, I see your argument. One patrol would be plenty," admitted Jim.

By this time they had reached the station, but before they could go in something unexpected happened. A tall man, dark and weatherbeaten by many a storm, appeared at the door of the two-story stone building. Favoring them with but a single glance he cupped his hands and bellowed in a voice that vibrated through the house: "All hands out for beach drill!"

"That's my father," said Douglas. "We're just in time to look at the daily drill."

A number of men poured from the building at once, glancing hurriedly at the boys, but all intent on something which seemed to be tremendously important. From a small addition to the main building they dragged out a gun that looked like a howitzer, rapidly placed it firmly in the sand, and then placed a box beside it. From the box a rope was fastened to the projectile that they soon placed in the gun.

A little further down the beach a pair of long cross sticks, looking for all the world like a pair of scissors, was set in the sand. Then a man who appeared to be next in rank to Captain Douglas saluted his superior.

"All set, sir," he said.

The captain nodded and touched a lever on the gun. With a loud roar the cannon went off, the projectile whizzing through the air, with the rope attached. Out to a floating buoy the projectile and rope flew, to drop across it much as it would drop across the deck of a wrecked ship. The slack end of the rope was speedily and efficiently thrown over the end of the scissors-like object, and in less than a minute's time a line extended from the sea to the shore.

Douglas explained things hastily. "The gun is the Lyle gun, and shoots the line to a wrecked ship. When they make the line fast on the disabled ship the men on this end draw the end here over the "scissors" or crosstree so as to make a line directly to the ship. The breeches buoy, something like a pair of trousers, is hauled by a second rope to the ship and the men come ashore in that. The crosstree is technically called a drill mast and it has to be fixed firmly in the sand so as to make the line tight."

"Shot O. K., sir," called Mate Darnley.

"Clear away for boat drill," ordered the captain. The men sprang to work, hauled the Lyle gun on its carriage into the shed, coiled the rope, and removed the drill mast. Then the second drill took place. A barn back of that station was the center of the next operation. The wide doors were opened and the boys could see a long cart with a huge and thick boat on it. Three horses were quickly hitched to the wagon and the whole contrivance moved down to the water. At the edge of the beach the horses were halted, in water up to the knees. The front and rear wheels of the boat carriage were pulled away, the heavy boat dropped into the waves, and the men sprang in, the captain at the stern.

"That boat is the surf boat," Douglas told them. "Unless it is a terrible storm, the life savers go out to a wreck in that boat, which will keep afloat in almost any storm. But when it is too rough the gun is fired and the crew comes ashore in the breeches buoy."

"How often do they have that drill?" Don asked, deeply interested.

"Every day, in the storm period, between November and April. But only once a week in the summer. It may look to you as though it was unnecessary, but minutes count in the battle for life, and

so time can't be wasted by clumsy hands trying to get into action."

The boat was now beached and returned to the barn, and it was then that Captain Douglas approached and the boys met him. He was every inch a sailor, and although they had not seen him in action the boys instinctively knew that he was the type of a hero who risked his life several times a year without thinking twice about it. He greeted the boys pleasantly and showed them through the station.

The first place visited was the tower, in which room the huge brass telescope gave them a wide view of the heaving ocean. Except on stormy and foggy nights all watch was carried on with the telescope. Just below this tower was the sleeping quarters of the crew, and the captain's own private room was on the first floor, beside the mess room and the kitchen. A small room did as a sort of parlor or smoking room for those of the crew who were not on duty in the tower or patrolling the beach.

"This is a rather old station," Captain Douglas confided to them. "We aren't right up to the minute, but we have enough to do to keep us busy. Some of the bigger stations have more up-to-date equipment than we have. This is one of the old United

States Life-Saving Service stations. We are now called the Coast Guard."

"I hope we can see some real service while we are here, Dad," put in Harry, eagerly. "I wonder if we couldn't get in a little beach patrolling?"

His father shook his head. "I'm afraid not, son. Government regulations forbid interference by outsiders, and you can only visit the station by virtue of the fact that I am in charge here. No doubt you will see some action while you are here."

Just outside the door Captain Douglas looked at the barometer. "Falling fast," he muttered, looking at the gray sky. "Dirty weather ahead, I guess."

After they had seen the whole station the boys went back to the house. It was fast growing dark, and while they were eating supper the wind came up with increasing force, causing the house to shake and quiver. The windows rattled continuously, but the Hazletts and Douglas did not appear to take any notice of it.

After the evening meal they went to the parlor, where Martha played the piano for them and the boys sang some familiar songs. Quite early all of them went to bed, the boys last of all.

They undressed by lamp light, finding it all very novel. The light flickered and fluttered, casting danc-

ing shadows on the plain walls. The house creaked, groaned and shook with every blast and the wind fairly shrieked overhead.

"My golly, this house must be well built to stand that gale," said Terry, as he slid down under the covers.

"It is," returned Douglas. "And as far as that goes, this gale isn't so bad. The house is built to stand worse than that. Blow out the light, Jim, and see if you can navigate over to the bed without running afoul of a chair or something."

Jim having safely made the journey across the room to the bed which he was to share with Don, the boys talked briefly and then fell asleep. Some hours went by and Terry, the light sleeper, was restless. At last he sat up in bed, listening. There was a decided tap on the door of their bedroom.

CHAPTER V

THE DRAMA AT FOUR A.M.

TERRY listened for a moment, and then, as the knock was repeated somewhat louder, he leaned over and shook Douglas, who was sleeping beside him. With a grunt his host struggled up from under the covers.

"'Smatter?" inquired Harry.

"Somebody is knocking at the door," Terry returned.

Without further words Douglas slid out of bed, expertly located a bathrobe in the dark and stepped to the door. Terry noted that the house still vibrated to the touch of the storm.

Douglas opened the door, to be bathed in a glow of yellow light. His cousin Martha, wrapped securely in a dressing gown, was there. Douglas blinked violently in the light.

"What's wrong, Martha?" he asked.

"There is a ship sending up rockets from the

rock," she returned. "I thought maybe you'd like to see the rescue."

"We surely would," replied Douglas, coming to life all at once. "Thanks a lot."

Martha withdrew and Douglas shut the door, feeling around the washstand for his box of matches. In another minute he had the lamp going.

"Wake those fellows up," he commanded Terry. "We're going to see some real action."

Terry needed no further urging. He jumped from the warmth of the hospitable bed, shivering as his feet touched the cold rag rug on the floor. A single bound carried him to the bed where the Mercer brothers slept peacefully on. Grasping them by the shoulders Terry began to shake them with unnecessary vigor.

"Arouse yourselves, comrades!" he called. "The ship is sinking!"

The brothers woke up, startled, and looked around the room. For a moment they could not remember where they were and the sight of Douglas, struggling into his clothes beside the yellow oil lamp, did not help them any. Then it came back to them all at once.

"What's the trouble?" asked Don, rubbing his eyes.

"There is a ship in distress sending up rockets from the Daggerpoint," explained Douglas. "Dress on the double quick and we'll go see the rescue."

With a bound the Mercer boys hit the floor and began to don their clothes. Terry had already started and for a moment nothing more was said.

"So we're going to witness a real rescue, eh?" mused Jim, aloud.

"If there is one," returned Harry.

"What do you mean?" asked Jim, startled. "Is there any danger of the men losing their lives?"

"Oh, I don't mean it that way. You see, every time rockets go up, or a ship calls for help, it doesn't mean that it is necessarily sinking. They may simply be having a hard time and the crew from the station helps them to get going again, sometimes by shifting their cargo or getting them off a small reef. We'll see what kind of a case this one will be."

By this time the four chums were hustling into their overcoats and bundling up to their chins. They left the room at the same time, running down stairs to the main door in the front hall. Martha had thoughtfully lighted lamps in the hall and the entry at the front door, and just before they went out she appeared, fully dressed and swathed in a sou'wester and her hands protected by thick mittens.

"Are you coming out?" asked Jim, in surprise.

Harry laughed. "Martha always appears on the beach when there is a wreck," he said. "She gets coffee for the men and she is an unsung hero. Did you see what time it was, Martha?"

"Just four o'clock," the girl replied, her eyes shining.

"The wee, small hours," commented Douglas. "Now, fellows, all together on this door."

"Poof! Can't you open it alone?" snorted Terry.

"Let's see you do it," said Harry, stepping back.

Mr. Mackson put his shoulder to the door and gave it a mighty push. It opened for the space of a foot and then the gale caught it smartly. Terry returned to the group in the hall so fast that he landed in a heap at the bottom of the stairs, while the others roared with delight.

"What a country!" growled the red-head. "Best way to get out of a house is to open a back door, if you can, and then open the front door and be blown five miles across the sand!"

The others had now pitted their strength against that of the gale and the front door opened long enough to let them out. Terry was the last one and he had trouble emerging before the door smashed shut. Once outside the breath was pushed back down

their throats as they hastened down the slope to the station.

Off to sea a final red rocket gleamed against the sky and they saw for one instant what was going on. The surf boat had long since been launched and was bucking the heavy waves in an effort to reach the ship, some three miles out. It was a two-masted schooner which pitched and tossed in the smothering sea, and the men in the life-saving crew were bending to the long oars as they fought to reach the stranded ship.

The station was lighted up when they reached it and Dan Kent, the cook, was standing on the beach watching the progress of the surf boat. Martha hurried up to him, placing her lips to his ear, and she shouted something to him. He nodded and together they made their way into the station, to the kitchen.

Meanwhile the boys stood on the beach, finding it most difficult to keep their feet under them. The wind was blowing with intense force, whipping the small particles of sand and the light spray into their faces with stinging force. A few feet from them the surf pounded and roared with thunderous strokes, and to the Mercers and Terry, who had seen a little of the sea, it seemed impossible that anyone could live in such a furious storm. But every

now, and then, against the slate-colored sky they could see the life-boat bob up, moving ever further and further away from the shore.

There was nothing to do but wait and this they did with the best grace they could command. All of them longed to be aboard the boat and on the way out to the schooner, but they knew it was a man's game and nothing for young boys unaccustomed to fighting by inches for the preservation of human life. They noted that there was no rain or snow, that it was simply a heavy blow, accompanied by a dull, threatening sky.

Nothing was said because it was almost an impossibility to say anything. As they stood there they became numb, even though they did thresh their hands and feet together, and when it seemed that they could not stand it any longer Douglas waved his hand toward the station and they trotted up to the door, went in in a rush, and for a moment were overwhelmed by the light and warmth.

"Oh, boy!" gasped Don, brushing the tears from his eyes. "What a blow!"

"How would you like to be out there in the open boat?" Jim demanded.

"There will surely be a rescue on that boat, won't there?" Terry asked.

"Oh, yes, that schooner looks to be done for. The crew will have to come ashore, if they aren't already frozen to death. Let's see if we can be of any assistance in the kitchen," said Douglas.

When they entered the station kitchen they found Kent and Martha busily engaged in making coffee. Two huge pots were boiling on the stove, and the girl was setting cups around the long table.

"You fellows get ready to hand this stuff around," the cook directed. "When the boys get in they'll be about frozen and we'll have to pile hot coffee into 'em. Guess they must be on the wreck by now, eh?"

"I should say so," nodded Douglas. "Sorry we missed the launching of the boat."

"Well, them things happen in a hurry," chuckled the cook. "'Bout a half hour ago the last signal went up and the boat was well out. The lookout in the tower saw the first rocket go up and the boat hit the water less'n two minutes afterward. Didn't have no trouble and the boys got away to a good start."

"There wasn't any beach patrol tonight, was there?" Douglas inquired.

"No, wasn't overcast enough for that. The telescope done the work all right by herself. Best shift

that coffee pot back toward the rear of the stove, Marthy."

Time dragged after that and the boys went out from time to time to look toward the schooner. It was not until a gray light was streaking the sky that Douglas saw the surf boat coming back. He set up a shout.

"Here she comes, at last!"

The boat was still a good mile out and making heavy weather against the stubborn waves, but it was slowly but surely nearing the shore. There was no doubt that the crew was nearly exhausted, their six-mile row in the tossing seas requiring every ounce of courage and grit.

"They must have the crew of the schooner aboard with 'em," the cook muttered.

When at last the life boat crew approached the shore the boys ran down to the water's edge to greet them, while Martha and the cook poured coffee. Beside the members of the crew there were six inert forms lying in the bottom of the huge boat, looking very much as though they were dead. In a smother of foam the surf boat landed on the beach.

"Let's lend a hand, fellows," shouted Douglas, and the four boys dashed forward. Without saying

a word to the members of the crew they seized the wet men from the bottom of the boat, Don and Jim taking one and Terry and Douglas lifting another. The men were heavy and the boys staggered as they bore the apparently lifeless bodies up the slope to the station. Back of them members of the life station carried the remaining men to the building while weary men hauled the boat out of the surf and had the horses take the car back to the barn.

Captain Douglas gave short, sharp commands and the half unconscious men were rushed to the bunk room, stripped and rubbed down, the boys assisting. Then they were stowed between blankets, and being now conscious were literally drowned in hot coffee. Douglas and the boys carried the coffee and looked on in wonder while all of the men, rescuers and rescued, drank cup after cup of the scalding fluid. They each drank a cup of it and enjoyed it, but the sailors gulped it down steaming hot. Martha and Kent poured tirelessly and cheerfully.

"Nice work, boys," the captain complimented the chums. "You'd all make good life-savers. In case you don't know what to do with yourselves when you graduate from school, come down here and perhaps I can get you positions with the coast guards."

The day had fully dawned when they went back to the house. The force of the wind had abated but the change in the weather had brought a steely fog with it, which hung low over the shore, shutting out the ocean from view.

CHAPTER VI

A CHANCE WITH THE BEACH PATROL

BREAKFAST that morning was a most welcome and interesting affair. Soon after their return to Hazlett's they had it, and never had a meal seemed so good. It was eaten in the dining room with the wide windows, which faced the sea, and a gray light flooded over the table. Most mornings they were to enjoy the view across the blue sea, but this morning there was nothing to be seen but a gray blanket.

They discussed the events of the early morning with enthusiasm. Douglas had witnessed the same scene many times, and Martha had helped in the making and distribution of coffee not once but several times that past winter. She looked at her self-imposed task without emotion and seemed not to think that she was doing anything out of the way.

"You're not, eh?" asked Terry, dryly. "Well, I happen to know intimately a dozen very nice young ladies who wouldn't bestir their tootsies to get up at four a. m. and pour out hot coffee to half-drown-

ing men. I think you are a great—great—something or other, Miss Hazlett.”

“I’ll tell you, Mr. Mackson,” said the something or other, gravely. “All of my folks were seafaring people and it runs in my blood to be a part of such things. I wouldn’t feel right if I didn’t help at a rescue.”

“My, my,” sighed Douglas, with a wink at the others. “Will you listen to this Miss Hazlett-Mr. Mackson stuff! How formal! Terry wants to call my cousin a heroine and ends up by calling her something or other!”

From that time onward the brunt of the fun fell on Terry. They all gravely called him Mr. Mackson. Don wanted to know if Mr. Mackson wanted the sugar. They tormented him all morning, much to Grandma Hazlett and Aunt Laura’s amusement. For once the red-head had no workable comeback.

After the meal they went back to the station and saw the men who had been rescued from the sea. Some of them were up and about, but two were so weakened by exposure that they slept on like logs. A doctor from Marietta came down later in the day and attended to these men, but there was nothing serious the matter with them.

As the gray fog promised to hang over the land

and sea for some hours to come the men prepared for beach patrol that night. They had regular watches and knew just how to start out at the proper time. The boys looked all around the place, and then, seeing that there was nothing to really attract their particular notice Douglas suggested that they take a walk up the beach. This was agreed to and they started off in the direction of the neighboring station, almost two miles away.

The schooner which had run aground on the previous night had sunk and there was nothing left to do with it. In cases where sinking did not occur there was generally salvaging of cargo, but that was not to be with the schooner. Just as soon as they were fit to do so the crew from the ship would go on to Boston and report in detail the loss of the ship, there to book passage on some other boat.

It was a pleasant walk up the beach, in spite of the weather. It was a raw, disagreeable day, but the boys were well bundled up and the fog did not penetrate through the tough oilskins. They found their way over sand dunes and down in hollows filled with tough beach grass.

"Aren't these hollows often filled up by the tide?" Don asked, as they dipped down between two hills.

"Sure," replied Douglas. "Every time there is

a storm these hollows become inland lakes. It is a good thing that few people ever fool around here, for someone would be sure to be caught by the incoming tide and carried out."

"Is it as strong as that?" gasped Jim.

"Not strong enough to carry a man out of itself, but if it was dark and he went blundering around for direction he would almost be certain to walk toward the sea and then he would go out. The men on patrol walk around the hollows most of the time, but if the tide isn't too high they just wade through."

There was a brooding stillness over the ocean and the land, a stillness that was the more intense because there was so little to see. The surf rippled, but had ceased to pound, and there was no sound from the shore itself. They noted that the tall grass was bent in the one direction, away from the sea.

"The wind must be pretty strong to bend the grass like this," Terry observed.

"Didn't you notice that it was, last night?" retorted Jim. "I thought I would blow away!"

"Yes, the wind is almost always strong during the period of storms," said Douglas. "It blows in from the water and the grass bends over and stays that way. Here is the halfway house."

They were now before a little shack of one room

and they looked inside, for it was kept open at all times. It was a plain little room, with its one window looking oceanward and its iron stove. On the wall was a telephone and two extra suits of oilskins and an extra supply of heavy mittens.

"Those things are for the patrolmen, if anything should happen to their supplies," Douglas told them, with a nod at the sou'westers and the mittens. "They have to call the stations on the telephone and report whatever they saw in their journey."

From there they passed on over the sand hills to Bayberry Hill Station but they did not approach it very closely. Harry knew the men there but slightly and so they did not offer to go too close. After roaming around the neighborhood they turned and tramped back, arriving just about noontime.

In the afternoon the crew of the station had to go out to a small schooner that was in distress some ten miles out. There was nothing serious the matter with the boat but when the men got back from their long row they were tired out. They had managed to get the ship afloat and it was safe, but it was an exhausted crew that returned to the station that evening, just as it was getting dusk.

"By Jupiter, we got to go out on the patrol tonight, too," a life-saver growled, as they returned

to the station. "I feel like I could sleep for a week, let alone goin' for a walk down the beach tonight."

The rest of the crew felt the same way. The rescue of the previous night and the long row that afternoon had played them out completely, but it was a rigid fact that they must turn out for patrol just the same. Most of them turned in for some sleep as soon as their supper was over.

"Too bad we can't help by doing the patrolling," said Don, in the hearing of Captain Douglas.

The captain was silent for sometime and, at last he spoke up. "Look here, you boys, you want to do some beach patrolling, don't you? I can't send you out alone, because that would be against regulations, and if you ever missed a signal what a storm there would be! But I do think I'll send each one of you out with a man while he does his patrol tonight. You can talk to him and keep him interested and awake, and that will do the boys good. Want to try it that way?"

The boys were delighted and eager. They realized that they could not patrol alone but they welcomed the chance to at least get that much insight into the actual work of the men. Eagerly they assented to Captain Douglas' proposition.

"All right," said the captain. "Get your supper

up at the house and then report down here and go to bed in the bunk room. One of you will go out with the first patrolman and then another will follow with the second and so on. You will be ready to turn out the minute the notice is given and you can go back to sleep when the patrol is over. It takes about an hour for each patrol and eight men will do the patrol throughout the night. There will be eight different men and you can each make two different trips. It won't be a bad night, but I wish it was, in one way, although for the sake of my men I don't."

"Why did you wish it was, Dad?" inquired Harry.

"Just so I could show you fellows what a patrolman has to put up with, being turned out of a warm bed to take his trick on the beach. But you may see that sometime and then you'll get a fair idea of what the men have to do."

After the meal up at the house the boys drew lots to see who should go out on the first patrol at eleven. Don won, with Terry following, Douglas and Jim being in line after them. They went down to the station after supper and stayed with the men until nine, at which time they turned in with the men in the bunk room.

Under ordinary circumstances the men might have

resented the coming of these boys at such a time but just now they were too tired to think of anything but sleep. Without comment, at least in the presence of the boys, they went to bed in the bunk room, the boys following them. Don scarcely spent any of his time until eleven sleeping, but there was not one of the crew who wasted time by lying awake. A medley of snorts and snores told him that the men were using every minute of their time for sleeping, and just before eleven he dropped into a sound sleep, from which he was aroused by a shake on his arm. Opening his eyes he saw Tom Duke, a husky longshoreman, bending over him.

"Turn out, boy," said Duke, briefly.

Don sprang out of his bunk and dressed swiftly. Life at Woodcrest had taught him how to do that and he did not keep Duke waiting for him any longer than was necessary. They had not disturbed any of the sleepers, indeed nothing but a cannon or the thrilling command of "Turn out to the boat!" would have done that, and they left the room fully clothed in sou'westers, oilskins hats and boots. A single step took them out doors to the beach.

They walked along for several yards in silence. Tom Duke was no snob by any matter of means, but he, as well as the rest of the men, had reserved

judgment as far as the boys were concerned. They had all taken the orders of their skipper without comment, though there was a slight feeling of prejudice on the part of all coast guard men against outside interference in their own affairs. They all had more than ordinary interest in these boys because they were young soldiers, and they had seen Douglas in his uniform, but Don realized as he walked along that they must all win their way to the hearts of the somewhat reserved men.

The shore was black but Duke picked his way surely over the dunes and toward the halfway house, his face turned seaward, his ears on the alert. Don began by asking a question as to the method of signalling in case a ship in distress was sighted.

"Of course you don't run back to the station, do you?" he asked.

"No," replied Duke. "If we are near the halfway house we telephone in, but if we ain't we set a flare." He showed Don a case which he carried strapped to his belt. "The red flares are in here, and if I see rockets going up or hear a cannon I run on top of a hill and set off a flare. That burns good and long and the man in the tower can see it in any kind of weather."

After that it was easier. By degrees Duke thawed

out, until he was talking easily and naturally. He even went so far as to ask Don a few questions about school and before long they arrived at the half-way house. Duke gave a grunt.

"Humph, didn't seem like such a long tramp," he remarked. "Guess it was because I had somebody to talk to."

The captain's plan was working just as he had thought it would.

In the halfway house Duke turned the handle on the telephone and reported to the Daggerpoint Station. His report simply stated that nothing had been seen. Then he sat down on one chair and motioned to the other.

"Sit down," he ordered Don. "We got to wait for the patrolman from Bayberry."

In less than five minutes the man from Bayberry Hill entered the station and after exchanging greetings with Duke, he looked curiously at Don.

"Who you got with you?" he wanted to know, with eager curiosity.

"This my son Ted!" said Duke, promptly. "Ted, shake hands with Mr. Waterbury!"

Don held out his hand, repressing a grin. "How do, Mr. Waterbury," he said. "Any friend of Pa's is a friend of mine!"

Mr. Waterbury shook hands with evident wonder. "Sho, I didn't know you had a son as old as this, Duke," he said. "By jumping thunder, how time flies! I remember when your youngster was born— Say, what in tunket you tryin' to do, anyway? Your oldest youngster can't be more than six at the most!"

Duke then told the truth and the three of them left the shed after Waterbury had called Bayberry Station. Duke and Don went back along the beach and the man told him many interesting things about the service. They soon reached the bunk room, where they turned Terry and another man out, and then Don turned in until four o'clock, when he made another patrol with another man, who was more reserved than Duke had been. On this trip Don found out how a sleepy patrolman felt upon being awakened to be sent out into the cold for a cheerless tramp up and down the beach.

But the captain's plan had worked to perfection. All of the men had been kept interested by the boys as they made their patrols. From that time the boys became general favorites. The only thing that disgusted the men was the fact that the boys seemed to think that beach patrolling was fun.

"Fun!" snorted Duke. "Not if you have to do it, by time!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOYS GO ABOARD

ON the first Sunday which the boys spent at the Hazlett's place Captain Douglas came to the house for breakfast and spent a full day there. It was a day of wind and fleeting sunshine, but on the whole more pleasant weather than they had been used to for some time. All together they spent a happy day at the little house.

The captain was very proud of his son and had scraped loyally to send him to Woodcrest, a fact of which Harry was fully aware. In manly honesty young Douglas was repaying his father by making the most of his opportunities, and on this Sunday morning as they sat around the cheerful parlor the elder Douglas begged for stories of school life. More than one story was forthcoming and to them all he listened with evident pleasure. He had never had the advantage of a regular education in his life of struggle, but had worked himself up from a plain sailor to the post he now held in the government service.

At the dinner table he asked them for their impressions about the life-saving work. They were enthusiastically given, and he chuckled.

"Like to watch us work, eh?" he said. "But sometimes you don't see much from the shore."

"I know that," put in Harry, quickly. "We would surely like to go aboard a wreck sometime and see you work, Dad."

Mr. Douglas grunted. "First it is the beach patrol and now it is a request to go out to a ship. Next thing I know you'll want to keep watch at the telescope!"

"I'll wager my best bonnet that the boys could do that pretty well, Elmer," the little old grandmother spoke up.

"I don't doubt it for a moment," said the captain. "So you boys would like to go aboard sometime, would you?"

"We surely would," cried Terry, and the others nodded.

"Well, I can't promise anything definite in that line," the captain said. "Of course, you could never go out in the surf boat, unless half of my crew was disabled and we had to have men at the oars. But Jonathan Dean, the fisherman down the shore, has a whaleboat and every now and then he comes hang-

ing around a wreck to see if he can do anything to help us—with plenty of profit, of course. He only comes out when there isn't a storm on, and if you see him going out sometime when it isn't too heavy you may come out with him and go aboard."

"Do you go out to a ship when there isn't a regular storm?" asked Jim.

"Sometimes, yes. There might be a blow and a ship will ground on the shoals and then we have to go out to it and get it going again. You'll have to pay Jonathan a dollar to take you out, but I suppose you'll consider it worth it."

"Indeed we will," returned Don, warmly.

"The only thing I have to say is that you keep out of the way and obey orders promptly. See to it that Jonathan keeps his whaleboat out of the way of the service boat and snap to it when one of the men orders you to do anything. I guess you won't have any difficulty in that line, as you have been used to obeying at school."

"We'll see to it that we aren't in the way," Harry promised.

The boys looked forward eagerly to their chance to go aboard a ship in distress, but it was several days in coming. In the meantime they went down and offered Mr. Dean a dollar apiece to take them out

someday. The fisherman was staggered at the good luck which had come to him. He was used to going out and hanging around stranded ships without realizing any profit from it, and to be offered four dollars was a windfall to him.

"Yes, sir, by criminy, I'll take you," he shrilled. "Just you wait until another wreck comes along. Yes, sir, you can depend on me."

Jonathan Dean was a little dried up old man, a lengthy talker and a character if ever there was one. He occupied a little shack back in the dunes and made his living by fishing, lobstering and odd jobs. His boat was a cumbersome whaleboat but he knew how to handle it well. Satisfied with his promise to take them out the boys left him and spent a few uneventful days around the house and station, waiting for a favorable opportunity to go out with the life-saving crew.

One night soon after that they got their chance. A schooner carrying hides came to grief off the end of the hidden shoal which paralleled the Daggerpoint Rock and sent up rockets which were instantly sighted by the men at the station. It was a clear but cold night and the captain briefly told the boys that they could go out.

"Remember your orders to keep out of the way,"

the captain told them, just before he piled into the surf boat.

They found Jonathan Dean aboard the whaleboat and ready to cast off in the direction of the wreck. When he saw the boys coming he waited until they had hopped aboard.

"Goin' out at last, eh?" he cried, as he cast off. "Well, sit tight, 'cause here we go."

There was the merest rag of a sail for the whaleboat but it took them along at a surprising rate of speed. The night was not unduly stormy or the waves dangerously rough. The air was intensely cold and before they were halfway to the schooner the boys felt numb from the penetrating cold.

"I really envy the men in the surf boat," said Don, as they moved steadily toward the point where the rockets had gone up.

"Why?" asked Terry.

"Because they are rowing and getting some exercise. Wouldn't you enjoy some hard work right now?"

"I surely would. But we may get a chance to do something when we get out to the schooner."

It was not long before they rounded up under the stern of the *Lulu Barnes*. The surf boat had reached the schooner long before them and the men

were busily employed on the deck. The rigging had fallen down across the deck from the shock and was tangled all over the place. To the eyes of the boys it looked as though the schooner was slightly heeled over but it did not seem to be settling.

"Do you think it will sink?" Jim asked Dean. The old longshoreman shook his head.

"Nope, just scraped on the shoal, that's all. The station men will get it afloat in a jiffy. Comin' aboard?"

He made fast to the stern rail and sprang aboard the schooner, an example that the boys were not slow in following. They were so chilled by their cold journey that they found it hard to move at first. When they had limbered up their legs they found a sense of vigor and life that surprised them.

Obeying instructions, they kept out of the way of the busy crew from the life station. One or two men, unknown to them, and members of the crew of the *Lulu Barnes*, worked with the men at the rigging. Captain Douglas was nowhere to be seen and they knew that he must be down in the hold of the schooner. After watching the men for a few minutes they wandered to the starboard rail.

This side of the schooner was much lower than the other and it was clear that the craft had run

aground and was hanging on the reef. While they were inspecting this the captain came on deck and saw them.

"Here, you boys," called Captain Douglas, and the four boys hastened to him.

"There isn't much the matter with the schooner," the captain told them, rapidly. "It slipped onto the reef and the cargo of hides slid out of their racks. We've got to get the hides restacked and then we won't have any trouble floating her. The real trouble with this crew is that they are cold and tired. Who can make good coffee?"

"Jim's a crackerjack at it," replied Don, promptly.

"All right. Jim, you and one other—I don't care who it is—get down in the galley and make a lot of hot coffee. The hotter it is the better. The other two of you come with me and we'll help the crew pile up the hides."

Jim and Douglas hurried off to the galley of the schooner while Don and Terry followed Captain Douglas to the hold. Jim found the galley a dirty, greasy little nest, badly taken care of and in a state of confusion now, due to the sudden shock. There was, however, a good fire in the stove and after locating a huge pot and the coffee he and Douglas set about making the necessary beverage.

In the meantime Don and Terry found the exercise that they had craved. Down in the dingy and foul hold of the old schooner they joined the crew, some of them from the station and some from the schooner, all of whom were engaged in stacking the hides which had slipped and which kept the ship heeled over. Carelessness was responsible for that part of the mishap, for the hides had been carelessly piled, and now lay sprawled all over the floor of the hold.

They took their places with the men and picked up stiff and ill-smelling hides, tossing them upward to the men who placed them in the racks. This job took them more than an hour and when it was over they were tired out and thoroughly warm.

"No kick coming about cold toes and fingers now!" grinned Terry.

"You're right," agreed Don, wiping the dirt from his face.

When they hurried up on deck they found the rest of the men still working at the rigging, which was now in a fairly orderly state. Jim and Douglas were on deck, with the pot of coffee and tin cups, with which they were supplying the men with the scalding liquid. The two boys who had been working in the hold came in for their share and never had the bev-

erage seemed to taste so good as just then. In no time at all the big pot was empty.

"Make another pot full," ordered Captain Douglas. "Keep dousing these men with it, because they need it. The crew of this schooner has been on deck for hours."

This time all four boys took a hand at making the coffee in the little galley. When it had been made they went on deck and passed it around to the working men and had some more themselves. By this time the wreckage had been fairly well cleared away and the schooner in much better shape than it had been for many a day.

"Her nose is only rammed a little way in the mud," the coast guard captain told the skipper of the schooner. "Try it under full sail now and see if you can't back her or swing her loose. She won't bite any deeper into the mud, and now that the hides are piled she won't list."

The skipper had been listless and discouraged up to that time, but now he sprang into life at once. Sharp orders rang out and the men jumped to obey them. The mainsail was run up, the jib placed and the rope run out. The fresh, strong wind filled the sails and a tremor ran through the schooner. There

was a moment of silence and anxiety, and then the schooner slid off the bank and was free.

"All shipshape," announced the captain, as he prepared to order his men back to the surfboat. "You won't have any trouble now. First chance you get you had better spike those hides down hard."

The skipper, a rather sullen individual of the old school sailing master, said nothing at this piece of advice. Douglas ordered the men to the surfboat and Dean and the four boys walked aft, preparing to follow them.

Don was slightly ahead of the others and something unusual attracted his attention. One of the sailors of the *Lulu Barnes'* crew was in the stern, looking longingly at the surfboat. He threw one foot over the rail, as though to board it, but seeing the life-saving crew moving toward him he gave it up and slunk off down the deck, toward the stern, where the whaleboat was tied. In the black shadows of the wheelhouse Don lost sight of him.

"Funny," he reflected. "That sailor looked exactly as though he intended to desert and hide in the surf boat. Good thing he didn't try it, or the men would surely have returned him to his captain and he would have had plenty of trouble. Wonder what is the matter with him?"

Dean was speaking. "Guess we'll get back to shore, boys. Ain't nothin' left to see now, and we got no more right on the ship. If we don't get agoin' soon we'll have a long sail back, 'cause this fellow is puttin' on speed."

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERIOUS PASSENGER

THEY dropped into the whaleboat and Dean hoisted the sail. All of them were in the center of the boat at the time. The whaleboat was long and narrow at the ends, but with plenty of width in the middle. Without noticing anything out of place the boys took their places as the boat swung away from the schooner, which was now in good order and heading out beyond the shoal.

The surfboat was far ahead of them and they followed with what measure of wind there was, Dean skillfully pointing the whaleboat toward the shore. They were some eighth of a mile from the schooner when Terry made a discovery.

There had been some canvas in the stern of the whaleboat when they had started, and at that time it had been flat. Terry, sitting amidships and staring silently at the bow of the craft suddenly noted that it had changed its position. He was positive that the canvas had been in the stern and that it had been

flat, but now it was in the opposite end of the whale boat and very much puffed up. He had been second in the boat as they boarded when leaving the schooner and he was sure that no one had moved the canvas.

Without saying anything to the others he made his way around the mast and took hold of the canvas, jerking it toward him quickly. What he saw caused him to cry out in surprise and attracted the attention of the others.

There was a man under the canvas. He was doubled up and lying on his face, making himself as small as possible under the canvas. But when Terry pulled the covering off of him he straightened up and looked anxiously at the party in the whaleboat. They noted that he was of a weatherbeaten countenance, with black hair and a half beard. His eyes glowed brightly as he looked toward them.

Jonathan Dean was the first to recover himself. "What you doin' on my boat?" he shrilled.

The man looked around at the boys and seemed to find some hope there. "I'm escaping from the *Lulu Barnes*, he answered. "Take me to shore, will you?"

"You're half way there now," grinned Terry.

"Are you the man I saw trying to board the surf boat?" Don asked.

The man nodded. "Yes, I thought of tryin' to make port with those fellows, but this looked easier. You'll take me to land, won't you?"

"What you want to get to shore for?" demanded Dean, suspiciously. "Was you in trouble for something on the schooner?"

"No," replied the man, promptly. "I wasn't, but I had a mighty hard time with that swab of a captain. He's a slave-driver and I don't want to work under him any more. Here, what are you doing?"

Jonathan Dean was bringing the whaleboat around in the water. "I'm turnin' right back to the schooner," he announced. "I ain't goin' to be party to your desertin'. You had no business to pick out this ship to stow on."

For a single instant the man clenched his fists and looked as though he would make trouble. Then a weariness seemed to come over him and he sank down on one of the thwarts.

"Oh, I guess that's just my luck," he said, despair in his tones.

Don looked over the water to where the schooner was pulling away from them. He felt reasonably sure that Dean hoped for some money if he brought the weary-looking sailor back to the *Lulu Barnes*. He felt sorry for the man and he calculated that

it would take a long time to reach the distant schooner.

"Look here, Mr. Dean," he said. "Let's forget all about that schooner. It will take us hours to over-haul it."

"Don't care," responded Jonathan. "This fellow's got to go back. Desertion's a bad thing."

"If you turn back to shore I'll give you an extra dollar," Don invited, quietly.

Dean debated the question carefully. The run-away sailor looked up with interest and hope. But the crusty longshoreman shook his head stubbornly.

"Nope, got to do my duty," he said.

The boys were all disgusted with him. It was plain to them all that he had no interest in the duty aspect of the matter at all, but that he hoped to get more than a dollar for taking the man back. For a moment they were at a loss, not wishing to offer him more money simply on principle. Douglas had the clinching argument.

"You turn around and take us in, Mr. Dean," he ordered.

"This is my boat!" flared Jonathan. "I guess I can do what I want with it."

"Sure, you can," agreed Douglas, steadily. "When we aren't along with you. If you chase that

schooner it will take you hours to catch it and that means hours back again. What do you suppose my father will say when he finds out that we aren't in yet? He'll have the life-savers out after us and then you'll catch old Ned for making them take a useless row! We paid you to take us out to the schooner and that was all."

"You ain't paid me yet," grumbled Jonathan, swinging the tiller, nevertheless.

"It is the same thing," retorted Doug. "We will pay you. Now you turn around, or my father will take care of you."

Grumbling savagely under his breath Jonathan Dean turned the boat around and headed back to the shore. The sailor in the bow drew a sigh of relief.

"Why, that's mighty nice of you boys," he said, his tone friendly and eager. "If you knew what I had to put up with from that skipper you'd know how I feel."

"I didn't like his looks," Jim confessed. "How long have you been with that crew?"

"This is my first trip," the man explained. "I was doing odd shipping on the lakes and worked my way down to Martha's Vineyard, where I took pas-

sage on this schooner. Hadn't been on long before I got enough of that skipper."

"That ship was filthy," put in Terry.

The man waved his hand in disgust. "By tinner! That skipper wasn't fit to boss a cattle ship. I've sailed under many a captain in my day, but I never shipped along o' an outfit like that one. Where we heading in for?"

"The Daggerpoint Rock Station," replied Douglas.

"Daggerpoint, eh?" The man seemed to be considering. "Humph!" he said, and became silent.

Just before they reached land he spoke up once more. "Will you fellows keep still about my skipping?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," nodded Don. The others agreed, but Dean stared ahead without saying anything.

"Much obliged," the sailor said.

When they reached the land Dean beached the whaleboat near his own place and secured it out of reach of the tide. None of the men from the station were about at the time and the sailor seemed relieved. Don and the boys paid the indignant long-shoreman and Don gave him the extra dollar.

"Be a sport and keep quiet about this man, Mr. Dean," he advised. Jonathan merely grunted.

As they stood there on the beach the boys noted that the sailor was wet and shivering slightly. Douglas spoke up promptly.

"Come up to my house and get something to eat and dry yourself out," he invited.

At first the man hung back. "Don't know as I ought to," he hesitated. "No tellin' who I'll meet, you know."

"There is no one at the house who will hurt you," Douglas assured him. "The only ones there are my grandmother, an aunt and my cousin. You can't go anywhere in those wet clothes and I guess we can bunk you up somewhere."

The sailor agreed to accompany them and they set out along the beach in the direction of Douglas' house. After the long sail with its consequent inaction they all enjoyed the brief walk up the hard beach to the little white house on the hill. There was but one light in the place and that was in the kitchen. A few lights burned down at the station, but there was an air of stillness over it that told them that the crew had turned in for a much needed rest.

"Everybody has gone to bed," commented Douglas, as he placed his key in the lock of the back door.

"We'll see that you get something to eat and dry clothing. You're hungry, aren't you?"

"Hungry as a bear," agreed the man, promptly. "We hadn't eaten for some hours before the crash came and we worked hard after that. Can't hurt my feelin's by asking me to eat."

The kitchen was warm and cosy. A low fire burned in the stove and the coffee pot stood toward the back. While the boys took off their oilskins and the sailor the ragged sweater which he had on Douglas inspected the contents of the pantry.

"Man alive, this feels good to me," murmured the weary sailor.

There was a step outside of the kitchen door that lead to the dining room and Martha, wrapped in a heavy dressing gown, entered. The sailor stared in alarm at first, but was reassured when he saw who it was.

"I heard you come in," Martha said. "Is everything all right?"

"Yes," said Terry. "We brought this man ashore and are going to feed him."

"I'll help you right away," smiled Martha, as she nodded in a friendly manner to the mysterious sailor, who grinned a trifle foolishly. She helped her cousin

find some meat and bread, as well as jelly and a piece of cake.

Jim had seen to it that the sailor was close to the fire. "You had a few cups of coffee on the schooner," he said, reaching for the tea pot. "If you don't mind we'll give you tea, for a change. All right?"

"Sure thing," agreed the man, quickly.

He sat down presently to eat, and out of a sense of politeness the young folks drew aside and talked in low tones about the trip to the schooner. While this was going on Grandma Hazlett walked into the kitchen noiselessly. They turned to face her, then paused at the expression on the face of the little old lady.

She and the sailor had looked fully at each other. On his face there had appeared a look of astonishment that left him open mouthed. Her's was about the same, but she smiled first.

"Why, Luke Hughes!" she exclaimed.

Hughes jumped up and smiled gladly as he took her hand. "Mrs. Hazlett! Well, well! I've lost my bearings completely. Is this where you live now?"

"Yes, this is my home now," the old lady said. She jerked her head over her shoulder toward the

kitchen door leading outside. "Expected I'd be in the big house, didn't you, Luke?"

Now the man hesitated, but seeing that the old lady looked at him keenly he made haste to nod. "Yes, I did expect that," he said.

She shook her head. "No, Odell won, Luke. He lives in the big house now. Clifford never got the deed from Boston, you know."

There was a queer look on Hughes' face when she said that and he looked, for a moment, as though he was going to say something. But apparently he changed his mind.

"Grandma," cried Martha. "Do you know this man?"

"I surely do!" smiled the old lady, her gray eyes beaming. "Luke shipped mate with my husband some years ago!"

"Is that so!" cried Douglas. The grandmother nodded.

"Well, I am certainly glad that we insisted on bringing him ashore," said Don.

"Tell me what happened?" the grandmother said.

They told her the whole story and had just finished when there was a determined knock on the door. An instant hush fell upon the company and Hughes looked startled.

Douglas was near the door and he stepped to it. Opening the inner door and looking out of the small window in the storm door he called to them.

"It is James Odell," he announced.

A swift look passed between Hughes and the grandmother. At a nod from her Hughes stepped back into the pantry, closing the door after him. Then the old Lady turned once more to the waiting Douglas.

"Let Mr. Odell in," she commanded. Her aged figure seemed to gather strength as she straightened up and awaited the coming of her next door neighbor.

CHAPTER IX

A LITTLE OF THE PAST

DOUGLAS obeyed the command of his grandmother and opened the back door. James Odell entered and for a moment blinked around at the assembled company.

James Odell was short and a trifle stout, with a red face and a large nose. His eyes were shifty and uneasy. By his well-pressed clothes and the general air about him the boys felt that he was a well-to-do man.

"How do you do, Mr. Odell?" greeted Grandma Hazlett, calmly.

The man nodded and looked around the room eagerly. "Has anybody been here?" he asked, in a disagreeable voice.

"There are several of us here now," replied the old lady.

Odell waved his hand impatiently. "I can see that. I want to know if anyone, a stranger, has been here. I was walking along the beach and I just met

Jonathan Dean, who told me that a man deserted from a schooner and came ashore here. Where is he?"

"If he came ashore, what makes you think that he is here?" the grandmother parried.

"Well, I just thought he might be, that is all."

"What did he look like?" the grandmother asked.

Odell described Luke Hughes clearly. To the surprise of the boys and Martha old Mrs. Hazlett nodded.

"Yes, that is the man," she said.

"Where is he?" again demanded Odell.

"Why do you want him?" said the old lady, keenly.

Odell seemed a bit taken back. "Well, seeing that he had deserted his ship—I——"

"You were going to do your duty and return him to the ship," finished the grandmother, with a slight trace of sarcasm in her tone. Odell flushed and blustered.

"What if I am," he growled. "Such a character is dangerous, and I won't have him hanging around this part of the country. No telling where he will go or what he will do."

Grandma Hazlett shrugged her shoulders. "I

don't know anything about that. You may do what you like about it, but you'll have to catch him."

"Catch him?" repeated Odell. "Where is he?"

"How should I know? He ate here and then went on, probably to Marietta."

"You dared to feed him," cried the neighbor.

The grandmother drew herself up proudly. "Of course we fed him, James Odell. You can see the remains of his meal on the table. Do you think we would turn a hungry, wet man out without feeding him? I know you wouldn't feed an angel if he were starving, but we aren't made of that kind of clay, I can tell you!"

"Humph!" snorted Odell. "A good citizen shouldn't be entertaining beggars and runaway sailors. I heard how you boys prevented Dean from taking him back to the schooner," he went on, glowering at the boys.

No one spoke for a moment, but the grandmother was not to be crushed. "These boys have hearts, Mr. Odell. Of course, you wouldn't understand that, because you have the name of the meanest man on the coast. But if you want to catch this man I guess you had better get a start. Sure there isn't any other reason beside your good citizenship that makes you want to lay hands on Luke Hughes?"

"Ah!" cried Odell. "It was Luke Hughes, eh?"

"Yes, it was Luke Hughes, and you know it. For some reason you want to get your hands on Luke, and I know it. I guess you recognized him from Jonathan's description, and there is something in that uneasy conscience of yours that makes you want to see him."

"Never mind my conscience, madam," said Odell, loftily. "I trust it is sufficiently clear, at least I don't know why it shouldn't be."

With that he swung around and marched out of the door, which Douglas held open for him. When it had been locked and the shades drawn Hughes came out of the pantry.

"Good handling," he nodded to the old lady.

"He's still after you," she said, in a low voice. "Something beside that fight is behind all this, Luke."

"What was the fight?" eagerly asked Douglas.

Before the grandmother could reply Hughes spoke up. "Years ago, in a scramble to get into a life boat, Odell, who was mate at the time, purposely knocked me overboard. I escaped to shore, hunted him up and licked him good for it. But he was my superior officer and he had me locked up for striking him. I escaped from the jail at Marietta

and went west. Since that day he has been anxious to lay hands on me, and when this Jonathan Dean told him about me he recognized the description."

"He is your next door neighbor, isn't he?" asked Terry.

"Yes, and he is living in my house!" came the unexpected answer.

"In your house?" asked Don, after a slight pause.

The old lady sat down in the kitchen rocker and nodded. "Yes, that big estate that you boys can see from the doors and windows of this house is actually mine! Luke, sit down and eat your supper while I tell these boys all about it."

When they were all comfortable the old lady told them the story. "Captain Hazlett and I began house-keeping in Boston, in a small place near the water," she said. "At that time my husband was captain of a small schooner and was engaged in the carrying trade. His first mate was James Odell and Luke here was his second mate. Things went along first-rate and I knew both James and Luke pretty well, both of them often eating at my house while on shore leaves. Business soon got to be good and Captain Hazlett bought the property down the hill, where the big house stands and where Odell lives now.

"At the very same time James Odell bought a piece of property in the same locality. He went shipping on another boat while Clifford, my husband, was having the big house yonder built. We moved in it and had lived there about a year, when James Odell turned up and went sailing as first mate again with Captain Hazlett.

"My husband had just had a fine new schooner built, which he named after me, the *Rose Hazlett*, and on one of his trips he stopped off shore here and showed Luke and Odell his new property and the big house. To our astonishment Odell claimed that it was his property that Clifford had built the house on, and that that bare stretch of sand and scrub half a mile beyond was the place on which Clifford should have built. It was a clear case of mixup in deeds, you see, and neither of the men had seen the property before they bought it. Clifford was sure, however, that he had located on his own property, and not on Odell's, and he promised to go up to Boston, get the title deed, and convince Odell that he had built the house on his own property and not on the mate's.

"So on the return trip from Portland they went up to Boston and Clifford got the deed, or else he never did, I don't know which. And Luke never

knew, either, for Clifford never told him. But Odell must have known, because he says to this day that the property is his, and we can't prove that it isn't. The reason is that either Clifford could not get the deed or it went to the bottom of the sea with him. For a tragedy stepped in and I never saw Clifford alive again."

The old lady's voice was steady and the boys admired her greatly. Martha quietly placed her arms around her neck. Grandma went on: "Clifford wrote me from Boston that he had important news and that he was sailing in the *Rose Hazlett* at once. Dear, dear, if he had only said a little more than that! Anyway, while on the way home a storm overtook them and the *Rose Hazlett* sank when it ran aground on Devils' Reef, two miles out. Odell and Luke here escaped—it was then that Odell knocked Luke into the water, instead of helping him to escape, the rascal! But Clifford went down with the ship and the deed went with him, if he had it.

"James Odell waited a decent time before he came to me and told me that he had gone to the lawyers with Clifford and they both found out that my husband had unlawfully taken over and built on Odell's property. The bare stretch of beach further on beonged to my husband, in fact, we own it yet.

James told me that he was sorry and all that, but I would have to get out, so I went and he and his family have lived in it for years. I rented this place and afterward we all pooled our money and bought it. James Odell lives in what is my home and I don't believe that he owns it!"

"Neither do I!" cried Luke, banging the table with his fist. "There is something crooked somewhere!"

"Did you ever investigate that deed?" Jim asked.

"I surely did!" replied Grandma Hazlett. "And it was all right on the face of it. As for having the entire property traced and searched, that costs so much we have never gone just that far. We've always said that some day we would scrape enough money together, hire a good lawyer, and search the thing out to the end. You see, Odell knew several smart lawyers and he could have had a false deed drawn up, though I don't know as I ought to go so far as to think he did that. After all, I just can't believe that Clifford was wrong, or that he was hurrying down here to tell me such bad news."

"That is a very sad story," said Don, gently. "We express our sympathy to you, Mrs. Hazlett."

"Thank you," said the old lady, softly. She looked at the clock and sprang up. "My soul and body,

after eleven o'clock! Luke, Martha and I will make you a bed in a spare room. You'll want to stay here for a while, and then we'll see what is to be done."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hazlett," nodded Luke, who had been staring at the table cloth all the time the grandmother had been talking. "I surely appreciate your kindness."

"Not at all," rejoined the old lady, as she and Martha left the room.

As soon as she was gone Luke Hughes got up from the table, and went to the door leading to the dining room, and carefully closed it, a proceeding which the boys watched in wonder. When he again faced them his eyes were unusually bright.

"What's wrong?" Douglas asked, quickly.

"I want to tell you boys something," said Luke, in a low tone. "I didn't want the women to hear it, in fact I had no intention of telling anyone. But from the way you boys handled everything tonight I know that you can be trusted and I may need your help. Listen to this: I came ashore here tonight purposely because I knew that we were off Devils' Reef and Daggerpoint Rock. I knew that Odell was living here. But I didn't know that the wife of Clifford Hazlett lived anywhere around here. You

boys get this: Captain Hazlett did get that property deed down in Boston. I know that he did, because I saw it in his cabin. And I'm sure that it never went to the bottom of the ocean with him!"

CHAPTER X

A STIRRING TALE

TO SAY that the boys were astonished at the statement that Luke Hughes had made would be putting it mildly. He seemed to have changed completely. There was no longer the weary air about him, but he seemed to have come to life all at once. His eyes were bright and his face slightly flushed, but there were signs to make them believe that he was not quite rational.

"What is that you say?" cried Don, sharply.

"Do you mean that?" gasped Douglas.

Hughes approached and they gathered around the table. "Yes, I mean every word of it. I'll tell you the whole story, boys, because I know now how it is with you. Are you all relatives?"

"I'm Captain Hazlett's grandson," explained Harry. "These fellows, Don Mercer, his brother Jim, and Terry Mackson, are my guests for a couple of weeks."

"I see," nodded Hughes. "All right. Now I'll

tell my story. As your grandmother told you, I had been for many years a second mate on Clifford Hazlett's schooner, and I never sailed under a better captain. I don't know why he ever picked a snake like Jimmie Odell for a mate, unless—yes, I suppose it was because Odell was a first-class mate. I must say that for him, he was. But he was never a man, and you couldn't tie to him, as the saying is. The crews of Hazlett's ships could never go him, but they surely did jump when he cracked out an order.

"You know about the *Rose Hazlett*. She was a fine ship, the last word in her time. I knew about that property argument and I will say that at the time James Odell honestly thought that he was right, that Hazlett had built on his property. But by jumping mighty! he knows now that it wasn't so, and I know that he does!

"They went up to Boston and Clifford got that paper. Two days out of Boston he let me read it, and it was all shipshape. Odell knew it, too, because he went around the schooner with a face as long as a barrel of eels. Hazlett was sailing down here to tell his wife the good news, when a storm wrecked us on Devils' Reef, and he went down.

"We were twelve miles down the coast when that

storm hit us with all the force in a storm. It was in December and cold as the North Pole. Hazlett might have made port when he saw it come up but he didn't think it would be too much for the *Rose Hazlett* and it wouldn't have been except that we hit the Reef. Guess you don't know where Devils' Reef is, but it is just east of the Daggerpoint and is sunk out of sight. In them days the life-saving station wasn't here and when we did hit it it was all up with us.

"When the storm hit we had things in pretty good shape. The masts were bending like bows, but the rigging was intact, everything close hauled, and then we hit on the Reef. Snap went our masts, the rigging snarled up everything, a hole big enough to drive a locomotive through was opened up in the bottom and the ship began to go down.

"Hazlett ordered the crew to the boats. Odell went with them and I followed, but when I got in I saw that the captain was not with us. The last I had seen of him he was dashing toward his cabin. I was just about to go back for him when he came on deck with a long flat metal case in his hand. Running to the rail, he stuck out his hand and the case toward me.

" 'See that this is brought to shore, whatever you

do!' I heard him yell, above the howl of the storm. 'I've got to get some more papers.' And before I could move he had thrust that iron box in my hand and was dashing back to his cabin, with the schooner going down under his feet. But I didn't have time to think. Somebody grabbed that case out of my hand and that somebody was Jimmie Odell!"

Hughes' face was red and his eyes snapped fire. The boys leaned forward, engrossed in his story. More calmly Luke went on: "For a second I just looked at him. His face was like a crazy man's. 'Give me that case,' I said, and what does he do but punch me on the shoulder and knock me right out of the life boat!

"I went down for some distance, and when I came up I saw the boat going toward the shore. They had rowed away and left Hazlett alone on the ship. But they were going to save their own lives, for at that moment the good old *Rose Hazlett* went down. I was caught in the suction and pulled under, so far down that I thought sure I would drown. Hazlett was in the cabin when it went under with a lurch, so there was no chance for me to do a thing for him.

"I told you that Odell hated me because we got in a fight over a scramble into a life boat. That's

the only story I ever told. Mrs. Hazlett doesn't know a thing about that case her husband passed me, and that James Odell grabbed. I have my own reasons for keeping quiet about it. I know that the deed was in that case! Well, I was tellin' you that I went under and had a terrible job getting up. But I did fight my way out of the wash and managed to find a piece of wood from the schooner. It was the top of the deckhouse, and I floated on it for hours, finally reaching the shore exhausted.

"I put in a whole day at the hut of a fisherman recovering and then I went up to Marietta to hunt up Odell. I found him at a cheap rooming house and went up to his room, where I accused him of taking that case from me. He insisted that I was drunk and that no such thing had ever happened. Unfortunately, none of the crew would bear me out, because they had all been so het up tryin' to escape from the ship that they hadn't seen it. I treated Odell to a swell licking and kicked him down the stairs. Then I went through his room, turning everything inside out, but I couldn't find a thing. It was while I was busy at that he came in with a constable and had me arrested for striking a superior officer. He trumped up a charge and they clapped

me in the Marietta brig—jail, I mean, to await my trial.

“But that jail at Marietta doesn't amount to anything. I managed to bust a rusty bar and escape from the place. Knowing that it would be hot for me around this section I cleared out and went west, with the determination to some day come back and fix James Odell. I knew he would force Mrs. Hazlett out of her house somehow, and I'm sure that he had some crooked lawyer trump up a false deed to the place for him. I've been away for a number of years and tonight I knew we were going to pass the Reef. I hadn't planned to get ashore, but the wreck out there gave me the chance.”

“Then you are here to try and break up Odell's game?” asked Terry, as Luke paused.

“Yes, and it is high time. I did leave that ship because of that confounded skipper. But this is actually the first time I ever was in this part of the country since I left the jail at Marietta. You boys heard Mrs. Hazlett say that Odell is after me for something more than just the fact that I licked him. He sure is! Just by luck he found out from that Dean fellow that I was here, and when he heard my description he knew who I was. I'll wager that his conscience has been troubling him for years, and he

has been afraid that I would turn up some day. He can still have me locked up somewhere on that assault charge, and he would like to do it, you bet."

"Well, that beats all!" exclaimed Douglas. "So Grandma doesn't know anything about the case that Odell has?"

"Not a thing," said Hughes.

"Why haven't you told her?" Don asked. "Don't you think it would help? Couldn't the law take it away from him?"

"No. Nobody saw it happen, and my own word wouldn't be any good. I never told the captan's wife because I wouldn't want to inspire false hopes in her. Maybe we'll never get that case, and then it is best that she never knows anything about it. But if I can get a chance to lay my hands on it you can bet I will!"

"Odell will be looking for you," Jim suggested. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm goin' in hiding somewhere for a time, until things blow over. It is all on account of that no-account Dean man that he even knows I'm here. I was in a bad fix, and his boat was the only way I had of getting ashore. If I had ducked into the surf boat the men would have had to turn me over to the schooner captain, so I hid in the boat you

boys were in. But we'll fool them yet. After a couple of weeks have gone by and Odell doesn't see me he'll think that I went on and will ease up on his guard. Then I'll see what can be done. Captain Hazlett gave me that case to get ashore and by jumpin' fire I'll get it!"

"And you can count on us to help you in every way that we can," Douglas assured him, holding out his hand. Hughes took it and then pressed the hands of the other boys.

"We'll have to keep mighty mum about things," Hughes said. "You fellows keep your eyes and ears open and after a while I'll communicate with you. In that way we can get something done that will amount to something."

"If Grandma only knew the truth!" murmured Douglas, after a brief pause.

"No use in exciting her," replied Hughes. "We'll keep it dark, as long as we can. Some fine day we're going to turn James Odell out of that house that doesn't belong to him and give it back to your grandmother."

"He'll get the stretch of beach grass down the line!" chuckled Terry.

"He ought to get a nice stretch of rope!" growled Luke.

The entrance of the grandmother and Martha put an end to any further conversation and Luke was given a room on the third floor in which to sleep. The boys then turned in but it was some time before they went to sleep. They discussed the amazing tale that Luke had told them in detail.

"I hope that it all works out before we have to go back to school," advanced Jim.

"So do I," agreed Douglas. "We'll just have to see to it that it does, that's all."

CHAPTER XI

MARCH GALES CAUSE TROUBLE

IN THE morning Luke Hughes was gone. The boys were up early, expecting to see him somewhere about, but he was not to be seen. At first they thought that he might be sleeping late.

"Where is Luke Hughes, Martha?" asked Harry, as they ate a hearty breakfast. "Still sleeping?"

"No," Martha shook her head. "He has gone!"

"Gone? Where?" asked Don.

"I don't know. I think Grandma does, but she won't say. At least, she won't tell me anything definite. You can ask her and see."

But Grandma Hazlett proved unsatisfactory. "Luke left soon after daybreak," she informed them. "I hunted him up some old clothes of Clifford's and he went away. I don't know where he is now."

With that they had to be content, for from that day forward they did not see Hughes again. They were somewhat fearful that he might fall into the hands of James Odell, but after five days had gone

by and nothing was heard of him they felt easy on that score.

"Funny, I thought he was going to enlist our help," murmured Jim, when they talked it over.

"I guess he has some real plan up his sleeve," suggested Terry. "You wait and see, he'll pop up again some day."

The weather up to this time had been steady, wavering between close degrees of coldness, but free from storms. But toward the end of one week late in March things changed. A heavy pall of lead gray clouds spread over the land and sea. There was a queer puffiness to the wind and the glass dropped rapidly. The crew at the station was on the alert for trouble.

"Goin' to have a nasty spell, I shouldn't wonder," Duke told the boys, as they stood in the living room of the station one day.

By this time the four boys were well-known figures at the station. They visited it at least once a day and were familiar with the regular routine and knew the men intimately. All of the crew were friendly toward them, and the few who had at first growled at the "kids" in time warmed to them. The boys took care not to be in the way or bother with any fooling or in useless questions.

"You don't have much more in the way of bad weather after March, do you?" Jim asked.

"Nope, a little in April, but not much. By May and the rest of the summer everything is sailing smoothly and we lay around until late October or November. Then we have to git on the job again. I guess we're windin' up our season right now, but there ain't any tellin' how much hard work we'll git in the next few weeks."

On the very next day, at ten in the morning, Duke's statement came true. It was a dull day, with a distinct hint of storm and snow in the air, and a three-masted schooner ran aground on a sand bar twelve miles out. The man in the tower had been watching the ship through the glass for some time, and at last the bell on the speaking tube tinkled. The boys were at the station at the time. Captain Douglas, who had been talking to them, went to the tube.

"What's up, Rob?" he spoke into the tube. He listened for a moment and then turned around.

"Get out the boat," he ordered. Turning to the boys he explained, "Schooner in trouble twelve miles out. Doesn't seem to be much the matter with her, though."

The surf boat was run out and launched and the

crew began the long row over the tossing waves. The boys and the cook stood on the beach and watched them go. In the order of things at the station it was the duty of the cook to stay behind and take care of the station.

"This is the first time they haven't gone out at night while we have been here observed Don.

"Yes, and I guess they are glad of it," nodded Harry.

"Luckily, your father says there doesn't seem to be much the matter with it," Jim said.

"Just the same, the boys got a long row ahead of them," spoke up Smalley, the cook.

"Yes, twelve miles out and twelve miles back is no joke," smiled Terry.

"Too bad we can't see what is going on," Don said. "We can't even see the ship."

"Why don't you boys get a look through the glass?" suggested the cook.

"By George, that's an idea!" whooped Harry. "Funny we didn't think of that before. Come on, fellows, let's look through the glass."

They entered the tower and took turns looking through the glass. It was a fascinating sight and they wished that there had been four glasses instead of one. Through the big lenses they could see a

wide expanse of the gray ocean, the schooner with its bobbing masts, and the little life boat as it fought its way toward the distressed ship. They remained in the tower at the glass until they saw the surf boat reach the schooner.

"Well, nothing more to see now," decided Terry, straightening up. "Oh, my poor back! I wouldn't want to look out of the glass for very long."

"You're not used to it," smiled Douglas. "In time you wouldn't mind it. I suppose the crew will be busy on board for some time, and then they have a long pull back, so there is no use in watching for them. Anyway, it is about meal time, and I'm hungry."

"I am, too," admitted Don. "This is an appetite-giving atmosphere that you have down here."

While they were eating lunch it began to snow. At first the flakes were large and Harry expressed the opinion that it would not last long. His grandmother smiled and shook her head with a knowing air. The wind had begun to blow with increasing force and the flakes of snow became smaller but fell more rapidly. As soon as the meal was over the boys went back to the tower and looked out of the glass. The surf boat was returning and the schooner had moved on down the beach line.

"My father was right," said Douglas. "There wasn't much the trouble with her. Look how dark it is getting to be! I can hardly see the surf boat."

In a few minutes the oncoming boat was lost to their sight. A gloom spread over the ocean and darkened the shore. The cook made lights downstairs in the station and behind the windows of the cottage and the big estate of the Odell's lights showed. Out of the darkness of the menacing storm the wind thrummed with a faint moan.

"My gosh," murmured Terry, uneasily, as the tower vibrated. "I wouldn't want to be out in the boat now!"

In less than a half hour the boat landed in a smother of foam, the men coming ashore safely. They had worked hard on the schooner, Duke confided to the boys. It had been freighted with lumber and had shipped quite a bit of water. After this was pumped out and the ship pulled off the bar they had been obliged to make the long row home and were now pretty well worn out.

They ate heartily and warmed themselves up. Most of the crew had fallen asleep and had just entered the first stages of a satisfying nap when another hail came from the man in the tower. Captain

Douglas ran to the upper room and then came down hurriedly.

"Too bad, as far as my men are concerned," he called to the boys. "But there's a small boat send-up rockets off shore."

Grumbling but snapping into action nevertheless the crew once more got out the surf boat and headed out for the hooker which had run aground on the edge of the Daggerpoint. Fortunately for them, this ship was not so far out, but the three miles that the crew was compelled to row was more than sufficient for them in their utterly weary condition. Smalley the cook went out in the boat this time, leaving another man behind him. This time the boys were not idle, but helped to make coffee. After this was done they waited around and the time seemed to creep, for they could see nothing because of the gloom over the ocean. Inside the station all was warm and comfortable, but outside was stormy and cold.

"Your guess about the snow storm didn't hold good," Jim said to Douglas.

"No, it didn't. When I saw those big flakes I thought it might be just a squall, but now I can see that it will be a mighty big storm."

At suppertime, just as the boys had begun to

worry, the crew came ashore with the men from the ship. All of them, rescued and rescuers, were coated with ice and their garments cracked as they walked. Their mittens and oilskins were as hard as boards. Some of the men were too weary to eat, but Captain Douglas insisted that they pour several cups of coffee into themselves before lying down. Two members of the rescued crew were treated for frostbite.

"The hooker is breaking up," Duke told the boys. "Jammed on a rock and there wasn't a chance to save her. Anyhow, she wasn't worth it. Must have been used in the Revolutionary war, judging by the looks of her."

After their supper up at the cottage the boys went back to the station, drawn there as by a magnet in their interest. All of the men except the lookout, the captain and the cook, were sound asleep. The cook was washing and drying a load of dishes and Harry's father was anxiously peering out of the heavy window into the storm. Although he was weary himself his chief anxiety was for his men.

Outside the wind was blowing the snowflakes in every direction. It was impossible to see ten feet at any point. The captain sighed aloud.

"Tough luck," he half-growled. "My men are half dead, and still I have to send them out on the

beach patrol just the same. Must have been a vicious fate that sent two ships on the rocks in one day."

"Now is the time that we ought to go out on the patrol," said Jim to his friends. The captain turned around and looked at the four sturdy boys.

"Look here," he said, suddenly. "Would you boys really like to go out on the patrol on a night like this?"

There was a moment of silence. The wind smote the station with a whining moan and shook it to the foundations. Windows and doors rattled for a few seconds.

"Yes, sir," said four voices, all at the same time.

"All right," cried the captain. "You will just fit in and help tremendously. You will be able to take the places of four weary men and if it is a taste of the bitterest dose of beach patrolling you want, you'll get it tonight!"

CHAPTER XII

BEACH PATROL IN EARNEST

JUST before it was time to turn in the four boys made their way through the storm to the cottage. Once there they told the women of their plans and equipped themselves for the stern work of the night. Woolen hats and mittens, thick boots and an extra sweater they rolled in a bundle preparatory to going back to the station. While they were engaged at this task the house trembled and shook under pressure of the storm.

"Boy, oh boy," murmured Terry. "We will have our work cut out for us tonight!"

"Not scared, are you, Chucklehead?" inquired Jim.

"No," retorted his friend. "But I'll bet you are!"

"I am not!" denied Jim, hotly. "Why should I be?"

"If I were you I would be afraid of being blown away!" chuckled the red-headed one.

"Humph!" I guess I weigh just as much as you,

And I guess you had better keep your hat on while you are out on patrol."

"I'll bite," said Terry. "What's the joke?"

"If you take your hat off the lookout in the tower will see your red top-piece and think it is a flare burning!" grinned Jim.

"And if he sees something wafted past the window by the wind he'll know it is you," returned the red-headed one.

They had now gathered all of the extra clothing that they needed and left the house, bending once more to the blast. They ran the entire distance to the station and were glad to get indoors. Captain Douglas looked at their equipment and nodded his approval.

"That's right," he said. "Now, here are your orders. You can draw lots to see which one goes out first and settle it among yourselves. Each one of you will be provided with a lantern which is proof against the blast and you will each have three flares. I'll show you how to strike the spark that will set the flares off. You are to make your way to the halfway house, call the station on the 'phone and report if you have seen anything or not seen anything, and then, after a ten-minute rest, you are to head

back here. In case you see rockets or hear a gun booming, set a flare. Is that all clear?"

The boys agreed that it was. A lantern was set out for them and Captain Douglas showed them how to ignite the red signal lights called flares. He cautioned them about high tides.

"When you cross the outer beach, down close to the shore, watch the tide. If it is in, and the ground covered, don't attempt to cross it, but go around the upper beach, in the sand dunes. The men wade right on through the flood but they know their way. If you boys attempt it you may wander right on out into the ocean and that will be the last of you, because you could never swim against seas such as are breaking tonight. Attention to orders will save you trouble."

"Yes, sir," replied Douglas. "We're trained at school to obey orders, Dad."

"I know it," said Captain Douglas. "If it wasn't for that fact I wouldn't allow you to go out tonight. Now, draw your lots and then turn in, for you'll need all your strength for the battle you'll have tonight."

In the drawing of lots Harry drew the first patrol, Jim the second, Don the third and Terry was to have the fourth. All of them thought that he in particular had drawn the best.

"I get first crack at it," Harry cried. "Jim will be just in a nice doze when I come in and shake him out of it!"

"I got the the best shift," grinned Terry. "I sleep on until early morning, while you boys walk the chilly beach!"

"I like mine best," put in Don. "I get a good sleep before and a good sleep afterwards. I guess I got the best detail."

Captain Douglas smiled grimly. "Wait until it is all over before any of you start cheering about the shifts you picked," he advised. "Now, to bed with you, and turn out promptly on call."

It had been arranged that Duke was to start his patrol at ten o'clock, another man following at eleven, and Harry starting off the boys' turns at twelve. That meant that Jim would turn out at one, Don at two and Terry at three. Other men, hardier than some of their comrades, would carry it on until daylight, the iron captain himself agreeing to take a turn.

They went to the bunk room and turned in, undressing in the gloom and tumbling into the four extra bunks that awaited them. There were always extra beds in the station, beds designed to take care of crews brought from wrecked ships, and when the

four boys bedded down every bed in the station was filled. They exchanged no words as they got into bed and for a moment before falling asleep they listened to the heavy breathing of the exhausted men around them. Then they fell asleep.

It seemed to Don that he had been asleep but a short time when he was shaken vigorously. The hand that gripped his shoulder was cold, terribly cold, and as he shot up in his bunk he instinctively shook the hand off. In the dim light from a hanging lantern just outside the door he saw that it was Jim, but his brother's appearance made him stare.

Jim was coated with ice. In the light of the lamp he glistened and drops of water dripped from him. The woollen hat was hard as iron, the gloves, which were attached to his coat sleeves with a string stood out as though made of metal, and the boy's face was blue with the cold. His eye lashes were white with snow.

"Turn out in a hurry," Jim whispered, through blue lips. "You're on deck."

"How's the storm?" Don inquired, as he threw the covers off of him.

"Wait until you get outside and you'll see," Jim returned, going out of the door and to the kitchen, to take off his frozen garments.

Don dressed himself as warmly as possible and then hurried from the room. Jim was in the kitchen pouring boiling hot coffee down his throat, a furious color in his cheeks. The water was springing from his eyes.

"By the looks of you, it must be a wild night," laughed Don.

"You wait and see," murmured Jim. "Or go and ask Doug, if you can wake him up. He was exhausted when he came in. Got your flares?"

"Yes. The lantern works all right, does it?"

"Not worth a darn, as far as seeing goes," snorted Jim. "You can see your feet, that's all. Hurry up and get going. Give my regards to the halfway house.

Don stepped to the door, braced himself and pushed against it, holding the lantern sheltered with his body. It took all of his strength to open the door, and when it was open he was just able to spin through the opening and hold himself upright against the wind. A deluge of snow hit him in the face and for a moment he was utterly bewildered.

The wind was blowing a steady gale before which the snow whipped with stinging force. Bits of ice and sand cut into his face deeply, causing him to

wince and turn away, the lantern swaying in his hand.

For a moment he was dismayed. The thought ran through his mind that it was no night for anyone to be out, and that it was useless, since he could not see three feet before him and could scarcely breathe. Then the thought came to him that both Harry and Jim had been out and both of them had lived through it. Other men, the members of the coast guard, had been out and would continue to go out on such nights for years to come, and he felt suddenly ashamed of his momentary weakness. Bracing himself to the wind he began to fight his way up the beach.

Every step was a fight. He knew that he must keep a grip on his sense of direction, for if he ever turned away from the general direction of the half-way house he would not be able to find that particular location at all. The encircling gloom looked like a wall through which there was no path, and to lose for a minute his sense of direction would mean walking back into the dunes or out into the ocean. Bent to the wind, his lantern showing a sickly and flickering light a few inches beyond his feet Don pushed his way along the beach toward the shanty up the coast.

The snow was now fully three inches deep and

did nothing to help his progress. He felt his hat begin to freeze to his head and his mittens soaked with the snow and then froze. His boots became stiff and heavier and it now took added effort to lift them. He wondered what good it did for anyone to patrol the beach, since he could not see any distance out to sea, but he knew that it was not done for nothing.

"We wanted to do some beach patrolling," he reflected, as he made his way along. "Well, we're doing it, and no mistake!"

It seemed to him that he would never make the halfway house and back in an hour. But the others must have made it in that time, although he had not looked at his watch to make sure that they had.

For the most of the way he was able to keep along the outer beach, but there was one stretch about an eighth of a mile from the station where he was compelled to make a detour. There the tide had rushed into a series of flat marshes and he obeyed Captain Douglas' orders and went around the place. It looked easy enough to wade through, for his boots came up to his hips, but remembering what the keeper had said about wandering down into the ocean in such a place he made the circuit and got back on his route on the other side. The sound of the water,

as well as the direction of the snow, when it was not swirling around in circles, told him where the outer beach lay and he was able to keep to it on his way to the halfway house.

He sighted it at last and never had a shelter looked so good to him. There was a light inside and he fairly staggered into the place, to find one of the Bayberry Hill men already in the place.

"Hello, youngster," greeted the man, Perry by name. "Thought nobody from the Dagger was goin' to show up. Pretty well beat out, eh?"

"I'll say I am!" gasped Don, pulling open his coat at the throat. "That was some tramp."

"It was that!" agreed the man, with emphasis. "Goin' to call up your station?"

"Right away," nodded Don, and turned the handle on the telephone. After a moment the man on duty in the station answered.

"This is Don Mercer, at the halfway house," Don called. "Nothing sighted on the trip."

"All right, bub," came the answer, faintly. "How'd you weather it?"

"Pretty good," returned Don, as he hung the receiver up.

There was a fire in the stove and Don was grate-

ful for its warmth. His ten minutes of rest was the best ten minutes' vacation he had ever had.

"Pretty slick, sendin' you boys out," said the man from Bayberry. "Wish to thunder we had somebody up to our diggin's we could send out."

"We only did it because the men at the Dagger-point are pretty well exhausted," Don explained. "They had two mighty nasty trips today."

"Sure," nodded the man. "It was lucky for them that they had you boys to go out for 'em. Well, by tunket, our time is up. Good luck, young feller."

Don replied in kind and began his homeward trip. After the warmth of the shack the outside air and the storm seemed worse than it had at first, but he knew that he would make the trip. He skirted the marsh and came once more to the open stretch toward the station.

It was before him now, the goal which he sought. He was looking forward to reaching that inviting bunk with the warm covers, and to stopping in the kitchen for hot coffee. He was glad for the chance to experience beach patrolling in earnest, but honestly glad that it was all over.

It was at that moment that a dull boom startled him. It came from the direction of the open sea and

as he peered out in that direction, halting in the snow, a faint glare from a red rocket attracted his eyes. Another followed it, and a second boom of a cannon reached his startled ears.

CHAPTER XIII.

DON SETS THE FLARE

FOR a moment he stood there in the howling storm trying to look seaward and make out some details of the scene. At last his gaze became more steady and he was able to see a two-masted ship aground less than a mile out. Only when a rocket sent out its dull glare could he make out anything at all, at other times he could see nothing but the whirling flakes of snow and the tossing water close to his feet.

He ran along the outer beach toward the water and then suddenly stopped, remembering his flares. It was probable that the lookout at the station could not see the rockets and in that case it was all important that he set off his signal light. On the other hand, if they did sight the ship at the station, and he neglected to set off a flare, Captain Douglas would be sorry that he had ever allowed the boys to go out. With this thought in mind Don raced back to the top of a hill that he knew could be seen from the station and planted his flare in the loose sand. In

another instant he had it going and was bathed in its ruddy light.

He waited for them to come to him, looking out over the water. It did not take the men in the station three minutes to get underway. Lights sprang up quickly, above the noise of the wind Don heard the barn door opened, and the shouts of the men as they tumbled out for the stern work ahead of them. The flare back of Don continued to throw its bright light all around him and before long he saw the surf boat on its cart headed in his direction, the men running beside the cart. The horses were straining as they pulled the boat toward him, and turning their heads away from the stinging storm.

"Good work, boy," approved Captain Douglas, as he passed Don.

The other boys now joined their companion on the sands, shivering as the cold air bit into their bodies, for they were just from their beds and felt much colder than Don did. Behind the boys came some men with the Lyle gun on its car and the drill mast.

At the edge of the water a brief but frantic struggle took place, and for the first time the boys saw the coast guard men defeated. The boat was dropped into the water, the horses driven up the

beach to safety, and the men threw themselves into the surf boat. But before they could get the oars in place the boat was thrust sideways on the shore and the men forced to jump briskly to the sand, landing in water up to their knees. Once more a fighting attempt was made to launch the boat. The bow was jabbed into the waves, the men hurled themselves in and placed eager hands to the oars, but before they could get into place the boat once more spun around. This time it went over like a shot, hurling them in the water.

"Come on, they're overboard!" roared Douglas, to his chums, above the noise of the storm.

The four boys ran madly down the beach, greatly worried at the tragedy that was taking place before their startled eyes, but the longshoremen were equal to the emergency. They fought their way to the shore, dragging the surf boat with them, wet through but all alive. The boys gave them a hand at dragging the overturned surf boat ashore. It was useless to think of making another attempt at launching.

But no time was lost. The wet and shivering men ran to the Lyle gun and sighted it in the direction of the stricken schooner. The rope was fastened and then the gun was touched off. There was a flash of flame and a dark projectile flew through the snowy

air in the direction of the schooner. Anxiously the men and the boys watched it, until the rope fell limply in the water.

"Fell short," yelled Captain Douglas. "Try it again!"

This time the gun was sighted for longer range and fired at once. The projectile whizzed through the air, the rope uncoiled steadily, and when at last it stopped the far end was high above the sands, showing that the projectile had hit something that was above the water and the sand. A cheer broke from the men and the drill mast was swiftly placed. Over the cross piece the rope was dropped and secured, and now a perfect line ran to the stricken ship.

The breeches buoy, that piece of equipment like a pair of stiff trousers, was now rigged to the rope and Tom Duke sprang into it, pulling himself toward the schooner by reaching overhead and dragging on the rope. Under his weight the rope bridge hung far down so that his feet at times touched the water, but he was able to draw himself out to the ship steadily. He was soon lost to their sight.

Captain Douglas turned to the silent boys. "Up to the station and get the cook down here with coffee!" he ordered, and the four boys set off on a

run. In the kitchen they found the cook hanging several tin cups around his waist and preparing to carry two big pots of boiling coffee down the shore.

"Here, we'll give you a hand with that," cried Jim, taking one of the pots of coffee. It was heavy and Don took a hand also.

"Good boys," approved the cook. "I was just awonderin' how I was to manage it."

Carrying the coffee carefully the boys and the cook went back to the beach, to find that four members of the schooners' crew had come ashore. To them and to the half-frozen life-savers they busied themselves handing out coffee and the men eagerly drank the welcome beverage. They then turned their attention to the other men who were coming ashore in the breeches buoy. A line had been hitched up to the buoy now and the men from the ship were being hauled ashore as fast as the crew could work. There were eight members of the crew and the captain, and when that worthy had come ashore only Tom Duke remained on the wreck. In due time he too was hauled ashore and then the detail was complete.

"Complete wreck and goin' down," Duke reported to Captain Douglas.

The line was cut off close to shore and the gun stowed away. The miserable men went back to the

station and changed to dry clothing, warmed themselves and then had to go out once more to secure and drag in the surf boat. It was now so close to daybreak that no more members of the beach patrol were required to go out. A gray, sickly dawn was coming up out of the east and the snow flakes were not now so thick.

"Well, you are the lucky one," Don told Terry. "You missed the patrol. You needn't lament about it, because it was one of the hardest jobs I ever did."

"You are right there," agreed Harry. "We wanted to know what beach patrolling was at its worst and now we know. By George, I thought I would never make it when I first started!"

"I thought I would have to send my regrets from the halfway house," grinned Jim. "I felt so beaten out by the storm that I was almost sure I couldn't get back again. It was a rough experience, but Terry missed it."

"Well, I'll tell you," said Terry, with a quiet twinkle in his eyes. "I guess I know just about what you fellows had to put up with. I once worked on a wilk wagon and had to get up on some of the rainiest mornings you ever saw!"

The others hooted him into silence. "The idea of comparing beach patrolling to running bottles of

milk around to someone's back door!" declared Jim, indignantly. "That boy surely has some imagination!"

"The only thing to do with him is to send him out first on the next bad night, if we have one as bad as last night," suggested Douglas.

The bunks were now filled with the men from the *Vancouver* and the boys were forced to go up to the house to sleep. Don in particular was well worn out. They made their way across the sand to the back of the house and Douglas let them in with his key. To the surprise of the boys they met Martha in the kitchen, looking fresh and wholesome, and busy at the stove. Douglas, who knew his cousin well, did not express any surprise, however.

"Good morning," Martha greeted them, with a smile. "Is everything all right? Were the men rescued?"

"Yes," nodded Harry. "So you knew about it, eh?"

"Oh, yes, we saw the flare from the window and were able to see most of the work. I wanted to go out but Grandma wouldn't let me, said the storm was too much." She laughed pleasantly. "Of course it wasn't but I wouldn't excite her. I guess you boys must be pretty tired."

"We certainly are," her cousin agreed. "We're going to bed, and we won't guarantee what time we'll get up. Don was out on patrol, in fact he set the flare, and so he will need the most sleep. Don't be alarmed if Terry gets up first, because he was the only one of us who got anything like real sleep."

"Yes," admitted Terry, with a quick wink at Martha. "They were saving me in case of real emergency! Nothing startling came up and so I wasn't called!"

"That's right," put in Jim, quickly. "Guess what they were saving him for, Martha?"

"I haven't any idea," the girl replied, her eyes sparkling with delight.

"Why," explained Jim, solemnly, while Terry moved slowly toward him. "They were saving him in case all of the flares gave out! If they had, the men were going to plant him in the sand and let his red head show for a permanent flare!"

"Somebody else is going to be planted in the sand," cried Terry, making a dash for his tormenter. But Don stopped them from the threatened rough-house.

"Cut it out, you'll wake up everybody in the house," he cautioned. "Suppose we get in a little

sleep so as not to be ashamed later on by the length of time wasted that way?"

"The time won't be wasted, and you may sleep as long as you wish," Martha assured them. "Any time you come down I'll have something to eat ready for you."

They passed out into the hall after taking off their stiff clothes and Terry said to Harry: "That cousin of yours is a brick, Doug."

Martha stepped around the door, and by the redness of her face it was evident that she had heard what Terry had said. For a moment he was abashed and Jim seized the opportunity.

"For shame, Terry Mackson, calling a nice girl like Martha a common, ordinary building brick!"

"There is where you have me wrong," protested Terry, indignantly. "There are some bricks that are made out of old red dust, and if I called you a brick that is the kind I would mean, Mr. Jimmie Mercer. But when I refer to Martha my mind dwells with singular ease and pleasure on a brick constructed of solid gold!"

Martha laughed and blushed redder than ever. Don took Terry firmly by the arm.

"Come on," he said. "We must get this boy in bed as soon as possible!"

CHAPTER XIV

TERRY GIVES CHASE

IT WAS indeed late in the day when the boys once more descended to the downstairs of the house. Although Don was the one who had been entitled to the most sleep the others had taken their share along with him, and it was four o'clock in the afternoon when they all went down to the living room. In addition to a feeling of renewed strength and health they all possessed enormous appetites.

"But we'll keep mum about that," Don said. "It won't be long until supper time and we don't want to make the ladies do double work."

As it turned out, they could save themselves any thought on that score. Anticipating their coming the three women had a warm meal awaiting them and Captain Douglas was at the cottage. So they all sat down to a fine meal at the one time.

"Never was so hungry in all my life," murmured Don, as they ate. "Brother Jim, the beans to the left when you have finished with them."

"And then to the right, if there are any left," called Terry.

"Don't worry," smiled Martha. "There are more beans and everything else than you boys can eat up."

Captain Douglas was enjoying himself after the severe strain of the past day. "I want to thank you boys for your part," he told them. "You saved some of my men a weary tramp when they were dead tired, and Don certainly handled his detail in perfect order. You boys would make fine coast guardsmen."

"It is a very thrilling life, and we were glad to experience some of it at first hand," said Jim.

"You saw it at its roughest," replied the captain.

"How about that ship, Dad?" asked Harry. "Did it really go down?"

"Yes, there was no hope for it. Fortunately, however, it went down in pretty shallow water and the owner is going to have a diver go down and get from it certain articles and boxes."

"Oh, then we'll get a chance to see a diver on the job?" asked Jim.

"Yes, a diver will be here in a couple of days, and you boys can go out and watch him at work," said the captain.

"We'll do that all right," promised Harry, enthusiastically. "Where was it that the ship went down, Dad?"

There was a moment of awkward pause. It was Grandma Hazlett who spoke up, and her hand was steady as she poured the tea.

"It sank almost on the exact spot where the *Rose Hazlett* went down," she said.

There was another pause and then the conversation was abruptly shifted to other topics. After supper they went down to the station. The snow-storm had passed and it was intensely cold. All of the rescued sailors had left the station and the place was now normal.

"The captain and the owner of the *Vancouver* will be here with a barge pretty soon to take over the job of the diver," they were told.

It was just two days later that a lumbering barge made its way in from the sea toward Daggerpoint. Six men, all members of a diving firm, were on the craft, beside the captain and owner of the sunken ship. When they had located at a point off the shore, at the exact spot where the schooner had gone down, the owner and captain came ashore and conferred with Captain Douglas. The owner thanked the life-savers for their heroic work in rescuing

the members of his crew and promised that officials higher up should know of their heroism.

It was too late that day for the diver to go down and it took all of the next day to definitely locate the wreck. Captain Douglas had been out on the diving company barge and had spoken for the boys. When he told the men in charge the part played by the boys in the sighting of the *Vancouver* in her distress they readily agreed to allow the boys to come aboard and watch the diving.

"Lots of room on the barge," the owner declared. "As long as they don't get in the way of the diving operations it will be perfectly all right."

Captain Douglas repeated those instructions to the boys. "You can see all there is to be seen, boys," he told them. "I don't have to stress the part about your keeping out of the way. I know you'll do that."

It was late that afternoon when the boys went aboard the barge. They took a rowboat from the station and rowed out, landing on the shore side of the barge. To a capstan they tied the boat and then proceeded to look around the barge. It was a huge, battered thing, solidly constructed, with a mass of gear scattered all over the deck in every di-

rection. Most of the upper space was taken up by the cabin and it was run by a marine engine.

They found that the diver was just going down for his initial trip and watched him with great interest. An iron ladder extended over the side straight down into the water, and it was down this that the diver was to go, dropping off into the depth at the end. The diver was now in the bulky casing with which he was always inclosed, and they were then engaged in putting on the huge helmet and bolting it fast. In a neat coil on the deck lay a long rubber hose which was connected to the helmet which was being fastened on. This hose connected in turn to an air pump.

When the helmet had been bolted into place the diver stepped to the top of the ladder and began a clumsy descent. His suit was cumbersome and several pounds of lead weighted down his shoes, designed to hold him to the bottom of the ocean. Without this weight in his feet, the boys knew, he would fairly turn upside down, and they realized that heavy as the suit was it would be necessary when he encountered the pressure under the water. Step by step the diver made his way down the ladder, one of the men paying out a rope, and at the end of the ladder the diver dropped off. Here his

weight was too much for the man and a steam winch unrolled, letting him down to the floor of the sea.

Once under water a stream of bubbles came up, proceeding from a vent in the helmet of the diver. The windlass paid out the rope until the man was on the bottom, in a good hundred feet of water. Then the windlass stopped and plenty of rope and enough air hose was allowed the man under the waves.

After that there was nothing to do but wait until he came up, and it seemed a long time. One of the men was particularly friendly and showed them around the cabin of the barge. It was divided into sleeping quarters, an engine room and a galley. When they returned to the deck the diver was still under water.

"Who is this coming out in the dandy motor boat?" asked Don, pointing toward the shore, to where a fine motor boat was cutting its way through the dancing water toward them.

"That is Barry Odell, the son of our next door neighbor," said Harry. "He owns that boat and he certainly can sail it."

"Do you know him well?" asked Jim.

"Pretty well, but he very seldom speaks. He spends most of his time away from home in various

cities and I'm afraid he thinks this part of the country is pretty much of a joke," said Douglas.

Barry Odell drove the motor boat up close to the barge and shut off the power. The craft was a thing of beauty, obviously very expensive, and all of the boys would have liked to have had it. Odell looked very curiously at the group on the barge.

"Hello, Barry," greeted Douglas, quietly.

"Hello," returned the other, shortly. He seated himself in the cockpit and began to watch the work with genuine interest. After admiring his boat the boys pretty well forgot him.

The diver did not stay down long, but soon signalled to be drawn up by two pulls on the rope.

The windlass speedily hauled him dripping to the deck and the men immediately released him from his prison. He seemed glad to breath the free air.

"I got my location down now, boss," he told the owner. "I think I can get in her tomorrow and get at those papers or boxes of yours. But say, there's another ship in the mud a little further over!"

That caused a sensation but Douglas explained the situation to the interested crew. "That is the wreck of the *Rose Hazlett*, the ship my grandfather went down on," he told them. "It went down there a good many years ago."

"Yes, I could certainly tell that," nodded the diver.

As there was nothing more to be seen that night the boys went back to the shore in the rowboat. Ahead of them, cutting through the water with graceful ease, went the motor boat of Barry Odell.

"Too bad he wouldn't tow us in," said Terry, as they pulled for the shore.

"The Odell's wouldn't give anybody a hand," replied Harry. "At least, I never heard of their doing so. I guess we'll just have to get to shore by our own efforts, as far as Barry Odell is concerned."

"Nobody has seen anything of Luke Hughes, have they?" Don asked, as they reached the shore. None of them had.

"I have a feeling that he is just waiting around until a favorable time comes," ventured Harry, as they pulled the boat up the sand.

No mention was made by the boys at the cottage of the diver's discovery of the wreck which meant so much in the life of the old lady. It was a thrilling thought they agreed but not fitting that she to whom it had meant such a stark tragedy should know anything about. Whatever thoughts they had to discuss about the *Rose Hazlett* they took care to talk over in the privacy of their own bedroom.

Immediately after breakfast on the following day the boys again took the rowboat and went out to the barge. The diver was just ready to go down and they once more watched as he was lowered over the side into deep water. This time Barry Odell was not there, nor did he show up until late afternoon. The boys stayed on the barge all morning, chatting with the men and watching for signs of the diver. Twice he came up to report that he had made progress in finding his way into the broken open cabin and on the second visit he took a rope down with him. This rope had hooks on the side and was for the purpose of drawing up boxes or whatever was considered of value in the sunken ship.

"The bow is resting on a sunken reef," the diver announced, just before he went down on that trip. "She busted in half and I can get into the cabin without danger of tangling up my air hose and line. Be ready to draw up the line when I tug her."

A little later, in obedience to a tug on the line, the men drew in on the line which the diver had taken down with him and the result was a long box which the captain of the ship declared to be filled with valuable papers. After that the diver came up for a rest and to eat, and it was the middle of the afternoon before he went down again. In the mean-

time the boys had gone back to the cottage, eaten a big lunch, and were once more back on the barge, again watching the work.

Late in the afternoon Barry Odell came out in his motor boat and watched the diver go down. None of the men on the barge had paid much attention to him, mostly because he said nothing to them and had in fact utterly disregarded anyone. Barry was a tall fellow with black hair and eyes, and a sullen-looking face. He moored the motor boat up pretty close to where the man had gone down and sat there watching over the side of the boat.

Two more boxes were pulled up at a signal from the diver. This afternoon no one was aboard but two helpers and the diver himself. The owner, captain, and the other men had gone up to Marietta on business, and the boys had the barge pretty much to themselves. The two men remaining were very friendly with the boys, and at the present moment all of them, with the exception of Terry, were inside the cabin. It was a violation of things, for someone was supposed to be watching the diver for signals, and the red-headed boy wondered at it.

"Unless they are depending on me," thought Terry.

There was a pull on the lifting cord. Terry

shouted to the men in the cabin. "Diver wants to come up," he called.

One of the men stepped to the windlass and touched a lever. The motor began to hum and the rope tightened and began its upward pull.

"Sing out when his head gets above water, will you, son?" one of the men asked Terry. He was busy showing Jim a copper plate from the engine at the time.

"All right, sir," responded the red-head, looking intently into the water.

A disturbance soon told him that the diver was coming to the surface and at last a groping hand came out of the water, seized a rung of the ladder and the diver got his bearing. The rope continued to pull him upward, and as he came clear of the water Terry saw that in his left hand he held a long iron case. It seemed to be covered with mud and was corroded heavily.

"Must have found some relic under the sea," mused Terry. "Hello, I do believe that he is handing it to me."

The diver was indeed waving it in his direction and Terry leaned forward to take it, in order that the diver might be able to use both hands in get-

ting aboard the barge. But in that moment something happened.

The prow of the motor boat was very near, too near, in fact, and Barry Odell was leaning forward in his eagerness. Now, seeing the extended case, he lurched forward, and before Terry could get his hands on it the boy in the motor boat snatched it from the hand of the diver. In blank astonishment Terry glared at him.

"Hey! Hand that case over here!" he demanded.

The men appeared at the door of the cabin, shutting off the motor and leaning forward to help the diver. Barry Odell turned on his switch and turned the wheel.

"Nothing doing!" he shouted. "He handed this thing to me!"

"You bring that box back or I'll lick the tar out of you!" roared Terry, as his chums appeared on deck.

Barry Odell laughed derisively and headed for the shore. The eyes of the red-head shot fire. He made a flying leap, landed in the rowboat, cast off and settled himself to the oars.

"Terry!" called Don. "Come back here! What's the matter?"

On deck the men were taking the helmet off of

the diver. The three chums, unable to understand Terry's swift actions, stared at him over the thick rail of the barge. But the angry boy paid no attention to any of them. With all his might he rowed toward the shore back of him, bending to the task with grim determination.

Maybe you have got a motor boat, Mr. Barry Odell," muttered the boy, through set teeth. "But I'll get you anyway, and when I do you'll never grab anything that isn't yours again!"

Before Terry was halfway to the shore the motor boat had been tied to a dock and Barry was out of sight. The red-headed one rowed grimly on.

CHAPTER XV

THE BATTLE IN THE BARN

IT SEEMED an age but at last Terry reached the shore in the rowboat and beached it. Off to one side he could see the motor boat moored to the dock, but young Odell was not in sight. Dusk was beginning to settle over the countryside and no one was in sight on the shore. Terry saw to it that the boat was safe and then made his way with rapid strides toward the Odell house.

It was the first time he had ever been near the house. All of the boys had seen it daily, for it was an imposing sight from the cottage, but they had never approached it closely nor had they ever crossed its grounds. But Terry did not hesitate because he was on strange grounds. He was angry at the trick that had been played on him and he meant to have whatever the object was that the diver had handed to him and which Barry Odell had taken from him.

He rang the front door bell, determined to ask for the boy or even force his way into the house if

necessary. He heard a bell ring deep in the house, but no one came to the door, so he rapidly made his way around to the back door. He did not rap on it, however, for a light in the big barn back of the estate caught his attention. Feeling that the object of his search might be there he turned and made straight for the structure, the door of which was wide open. He stepped inside and found himself face to face with Barry Odell.

The other was obviously surprised. He had seen Terry start after him but had not imagined that the boy had really chased him to the shore and right into his own home. He was at the present moment working steadily on the case which had been passed in his direction. The metal box had been rusted fast and he was slitting the edge with a chisel when Terry loomed up in the doorway. For a moment they just stood and looked steadily at each other.

"What are you doing here?" young Odell, demanded, as Terry continued to look evenly at him.

"I guess you know what I'm doing here," returned Terry, advancing. "That case was handed to me!"

"It was like fun! The diver handed it to whoever was nearest, and that happened to be me."

"Suppose that was so?" Terry demanded. "That

diver is being paid to bring up objects from the sunken schooner. Why did you run away with that case? You'll go to jail for taking that."

"Nonsense!" scoffed the Odell boy. "This thing never came from the wreck of that schooner. Why, you can see that this thing, whatever it is, has been in the mud under the ocean, for years. Probably the diver kicked it up."

"It doesn't happen to make any difference where he found it, because you are going to return it to him. We'll let the diver decide what is to be done with it. You hand it to me, or I'm going to give you the finest licking you ever got in your life!"

"You are?" sneered the other, rising from the box on which he had been sitting. "Why, I'm the champion of my class at Boxer College!"

"I'm not a champion anywhere," grinned Terry, peeling off his coat with a rush. "But even so, I don't allow anybody to take things out of my hands when they don't belong to them. Are you going to hand it over?"

"Don't be silly," was the reply, a reply that satisfied the angry red-head.

There was a single lantern hanging in the barn and under its light the two fighters squared off, measuring each other with an eye to business. The barn was

large and not over-crowded, there being plenty of floor space in which to move around without bumping into anything that might prove dangerous. Odell had placed the case on a bench back of him and had planted himself squarely in front of it. Terry promptly advanced toward him.

The red-head launched a blow that Barry parried skillfully and he saw at once that his foe knew more than a little about the art of self-defense. In his turn Odell shot a short jab that shook Terry up and increased his anger, although the only signs of it were a certain glint in his eyes and a slight increase of the redness of his face. Knowing as he did that Barry was well versed in fighting Terry realized that losing his temper would not help him in the least, and so he kept his head clear and his senses alert.

Odell was decidedly shifty and twice sent short jabs under Terry's guard, jarring him slightly and steadying him. Terry bored in, sharp-shooting long punches that Barry had trouble in warding off. Nothing was said by either of them, and the only sound in the barn was made by their shuffling feet and heavy breathing.

Odell made the mistake of trying to pin Terry's arms to his body and wrestling. The first time he succeeded in catching both of the red-headed boy's

arms and hugging them tightly, but the second time he tried it Terry was ready for him. One arm Barry succeeded in capturing with his elbow and pinning fast, but Terry promptly clipped his jaw with his left. Odell let out an exclamation of anger and viciously jabbed Terry in the ribs.

This was his undoing. The jab momentarily freed Terry's right hand and he brought it up in a swishing half circle, to land it flush on Odell's unprotected jaw. With a crash the boy went down, rolled over on his face, and lay still. Panting and wary Terry stepped to one side, but after a moment was convinced that the rich man's son was really knocked out.

"Temporarily asleep," decided Terry, looking around the big barn. "Now, where can I find some water with which to wake him up?"

There was a pump at the other side of the room and Terry went to it. Close beside it he located a milk bottle and this he filled with water from the pump. When he returned to Barry Odell he turned him over and threw water in his face. He had just bent over to rub his temples when a stern voice back of him startled him.

"What is the meaning of this?"

In the doorway stood James Odell. He had been

out driving and had returned at the moment. Unnoticed by Terry he had stood in the doorway and had seen him throwing water on his son's face. Now, a heavy horse whip in his hand, he completely blocked the only exit.

"Your son and I have had an argument," replied Terry, simply. "I knocked him out." Barry Odell came to and sat up, brushing his hand before his face.

"What were you fighting about?" thundered Odell, from the doorway.

Terry explained briefly, nodding to the case. "The thing belongs to the diver, and was handed to me," he said. "Your son wouldn't give it up without a fight, so I was compelled to knock him out."

"I'm going to have you arrested for this, young man!" blustered James Odell.

"You won't do anything of the kind," snapped Terry, disgustedly. "You'll be lucky if that diver doesn't have your son arrested for taking that case from his hands."

"Let's see this thing which has caused all the trouble," said Odell, coming into the barn. Barry stood up, none too steadily.

"Don't let this fellow have the thing, Pop," he said.

Terry stepped in James Odell's way. "You can both of you see it, if the diver says you can. Until he does say so, I'll just take care of it," he said.

"Get out of the way, boy, and let me see it," threatened Odell, taking him by the arm.

Without waste of another minute Terry roughly threw the father two steps from him with a strong backward push. Odell's eyes blazed.

"Why, I'll trim the hide off of you, young man!" he roared, raising his whip. Barry Odell made a motion as though to dart back of Terry, when something totally unexpected happened.

Above them was the opening of a hayloft, and a goodly supply of hay was stored there. The Odells owned an automobile and also some fine horses, which they were proud to exhibit all over the county. From this opening in the hayloft a wild figure shot, flinging itself through the air and landing in their midst on all fours, like a big cat. It was none other than Luke Hughes, and as they all halted and looked at him he bounded to his feet, swooped up the case and dashed around the dumfounded James Odell to the door, through which he vanished at top speed.

The three in the barn were motionless with surprise at first and lost a few valuable moments, but with one accord they came to life. The father was

out of the door first, with Terry close behind him and Barry following.

"Come back here, Luke Hughes!" roared the former mate. "What were you doing in my barn? Come back here!"

His only answer was the sound of the strange sailor as he raced through a fringe of bushes back of the barn. It was now too dark to follow him with any degree of success and they abandoned the idea.

"Well, now we won't have to worry any more over that case," said Terry. "He has it."

"What does he want with it?" questioned Barry. His father did not answer and Terry shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe he wanted it for the same reason you did, because it didn't belong to him," Terry replied. Barry clenched his fists.

"Don't get funny. This whole business is your fault. If you had let my father look at it that man wouldn't have run off with it."

"He wanted the case enough to jump down and run away with it," commented Terry, while James Odell aimlessly chopped his whip at the grass. "I wonder why? Got any idea, Mr. Odell?"

James Odell turned on him furiously. "You mind your own business!" he blazed. "Get off of my

property and hurry up about it. I ought to have you arrested for mistreating my son."

"That would be foolish," returned Terry, calmly. "I guess you have had all the trouble you want as it is, and maybe with Luke Hughes around you'll find a lot more."

"Here!" called Odell, his face suddenly paling. "What do you mean? Come here and tell me what you know!"

"I don't know anything, yet," replied Terry, walking away. "I've just got a feeling that Luke didn't run away with that case for nothing."

No effort was made to stop him as he walked out of the yard and he returned to the boat on the beach, intending to row out and explain the events through which he had just passed. But he found that it was not necessary to row out, for the boys and the diver were just landing on the beach when he got there.

"Hey! Where the dickens have you been?" hailed Douglas, as they gathered around him.

"Out hunting trouble!" grinned the red-headed one. He turned to the diver. "Who did you hand that case to?"

"Why, to you," the diver said. "But it was mine. I kicked it up down there in the mud and brought

it up with me. When I reached the top and saw you there I reached up to hand it to you, but that fresh young kid in the motor boat took it. Where is it now?"

Terry told his story in detail and the others were deeply interested. When he mentioned Luke Hughes they exchanged glances of comprehension.

"Well, I guess we won't find out what was in that box, if anything," the diver remarked. "If I thought it would do any good I'd go to the house and scare the life out of that young cub for taking the thing out of my hands. But if you should ever find this fellow who jumped out of the hayloft let me know, especially if anything valuable is in that box."

This the boys agreed to do and the diver went back to the barge in his own boat. As it was growing late the boys went to supper and it was not until they were alone in their room undressing for bed that they again talked over the subject.

"I wonder what in the world Luke Hughes was doing in Odell's barn," said Douglas.

"I don't know," replied Terry, sitting on the edge of the bed. But he has some good reason for doing so. You should have seen the way he snapped up that case!"

"I wonder if you fellows see the whole affair as I do?" asked Don, slowly.

"How do you mean?" Jim inquired, quickly.

"The diver found that case in the mud near the spot where the *Rose Hazlett* went down," explained Don. "To keep Odell from getting that case Luke jumped out of the hayloft and ran away with it. Could it be by any chance the same case that Captain Hazlett passed to his mate, James Odell, the case for which Odell knocked Hughes overboard?"

"By jingonetties, it might be!" cried Terry. "Odell took it hard enough, though he got only the faintest glimpse of it!"

"But why should Odell have thrown the case into the water after knocking Luke out of the life-boat to get it?" puzzled Douglas.

Don shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. Maybe he did it to hide the truth once and for all. Maybe there was nothing in it. We don't know what was in that case, but Luke must have had a fair idea. For some reason he has been hiding in that barn and he saw the fight between Terry and Barry Odell. He was mighty concerned about it falling into the hands of James Odell, anyway. It is all a tangled mystery, and I can't make head or tail out of it."

CHAPTER XVI.

A COLD DETAIL

LUKE HUGHES' name was not mentioned around the house by the boys. They knew that too many questions would be asked which they would not be able to answer, so they kept the news of the latest adventure to themselves. For a while they wondered if James Odell would try to make any trouble, but he evidently thought better of it, for nothing was heard from him.

On their own account the boys began a private hunt for Luke but that was without result. As he did not immediately appear after his run from the barn they began to look for him around the deserted country back of the sand dunes, but wherever he was he was well hidden and continued to remain so. At last they gave it up and waited for events to shape themselves.

There was to be an entertainment at the local town hall and the ladies had planned to go. The boys were asked if they would like to go with them and they

consented. The plan was to go over in the old family carriage that belonged to Grandma Hazlett, and some question arose as to how many could get in it.

"At least five, maybe six," said Grandma. "That means two of us will have to walk over." She chuckled. "At my age I don't have to be a candidate."

Martha was busy dishing out some jelly. "I am going to walk over," she said.

"You don't have to do that," her mother said. "Let the boys draw some kind of lots to see who walks over. Or two can walk over and two can walk back, something like that."

"What Martha means," spoke up Terry, without looking up, "is that the rest of you are going to ride over. She and I are going to walk over and back."

There was a moment of silence. Every eye wandered between Martha and Terry. The red-head returned the look serenely, but Martha was very, very busy.

"Well!" said Harry, expressively.

"My, my!" said Grandma Hazlett, with a faint smile. "There won't be any need to fight over who will walk and who will ride, I can see that."

"You are right there," nodded Terry, carelessly. "There won't be."

That was all that was said before the ladies, but once they were alone the boys fell to teasing Terry. He took it all with solid good-naturedness, claiming that all of the fun was on his side.

"You boys may ride over in the carriage," he told them. "What will you talk about on the way? Nothing uplifting, nothing spiritual, nothing that takes you for a brief flight from the common, ordinary things of life! But with me it will be different. A pretty girl, a moonlight night, a——"

"How do you know that there will be a moon?" challenged Jim.

"I don't. But I don't see how we can escape the blessings of a moon on such an occasion. Go your own way, you fellows, when you grow up you may some day realize what my feelings in the matter are!"

"That's fine," chuckled Don. "I always like to hear a young man talk that way. But it is a pretty poor young man who makes his girl friend hoof it all the way up into town, I don't care how much smitten or how much of a moonlight night it is."

Terry said nothing after that and he thought deeply. On the night of the entertainment Harry

got out the old carriage and the one horse and hitched it up. To the surprise of every one Terry and Martha had made no move to start.

"Why don't you get going?" her mother asked the girl. "If you and Terry are going to walk you should have started long ago, in order to be there on time."

"We'll be there on time," Martha smiled, mysteriously. "We are going to leave a few minutes after you do."

"A few minutes after we do?" echoed her grandmother. "Why, you'll never get there!"

"Looks to me as if she doesn't care if she does or not," her mother murmured, disapproval in her tone.

"We'll be there in time, don't you worry," laughed Martha. Terry said nothing.

The others climbed into the buggy and moved off, deeply puzzled at the actions of Martha, who was generally so dependable and sensible. Left to themselves the two did not waste any time.

"Ought to be here any minute now," Martha told Terry, looking at her watch.

He chuckled as he nodded. "Yes, I think I hear the outfit coming. I told him to come up the back road, so as to miss the others."

They were standing in the little hall of the cottage when a handsome two-seater carriage, drawn by two dashing horses, drew up. The taunts of the boys a few days before, relative to the fact that Terry was going to "walk" his girl friend, had set the red-headed boy to thinking and he had acted. He had managed to get away from them one morning and go to Marietta, where he hired a really handsome outfit for that evening. There were still many people who preferred to travel by horse and buggy in that part of the country in spite of automobile popularity, and it had been easy to get a good set of equipment. Now it was at the door and they gleefully went out to the driver.

The man was paid off and departed to spend the evening with a friend down at the coast guard station, while Terry assisted Martha into the two-seater. Terry was well used to horses and felt right at home as they drove out of the yard. A fragment of a moon was obscured from time to time by rags of clouds and it looked as though a decided blow was coming up. It was getting colder by the minute, and in spite of good warm bundling both Terry and Martha felt cold.

"Now to catch up with the family," chuckled Terry, as they picked up speed on the road. The

horses were more than willing to show a clean pair of heels on such a night.

"When we see them we'll just about know them," laughed Martha.

"Just about is right," returned Terry.

It was not long before they saw the Hazlett carriage before them, jolting over the uneven road at a much slower pace than they were moving. Martha advised Terry to wait until they hit a wide stretch of road before drawing up beside the family. This Terry did and to perfection.

Those in the carriage heard the sharp rat-tat of the dashing pair of trotters and looked around. To their surprise they saw Terry sitting up very straight and driving carelessly, and Martha, looking unconcerned beside him. The strip of a moon was out at the time and things were perfectly plain.

Martha's voice reached the ears of the company in the carriage. "Isn't that the Hazlett family, Mr. Mackson?" they heard her say.

Terry looked with exaggerated intensity. "Why, yes, I do believe that it is, Martha. I thought I recognized the rather—er—ancient equipment as theirs. Well, some folks progress and others just seem to stand still, I don't know why." He raised

his hat politely as the two-seater whirled by. "Good evening, folks."

He was answered with a laugh from the inmates of the carriage, to which he and Martha apparently paid no attention, for they kept on going and soon out-distanced the others. Grandma Hazlett chuckled delightedly at the joke, and the boys admitted that they had been taken in.

"Put one over on us again, as he usually does," laughed Don.

When they reached the local playhouse they found that Terry and Martha had thoughtfully reserved a row of seats for all of them, so that they could sit together. Terry and his companion had to stand a good bit of joshing, but this time they were able to hit back with telling effect. When the curtain went up they stopped talking and enjoyed an amateur performance that was funnier than it was meant to be.

During the performance they noticed that the windows of the hall shook and rattled with increasing force, so that when they left the place at the end of the performance they were prepared for a change in the weather. The slice of a moon had disappeared and wind clouds covered the sky from end to end. The wind, added to the intense cold,

made their journey home anything but pleasant, and Terry and Martha were glad to have a fast team to get them there.

When they arrived they found the man waiting for the team. He was standing on the front porch of the Hazlett cottage, stamping and kicking his feet, looking out to sea. Looking in that direction Terry and his companion saw the car and the horses on the beach. The car was empty of the surf boat.

"Is there a wreck?" Terry asked the driver.

"Yep, just sent up rockets," the man answered. "Crew's out there now, and a mean night it is to go out."

After he had gone away, taking the hired team with him, Terry and Martha turned their attention to warming up the cottage for the others. It was not long before they arrived and the news was soon told.

"The men will be frozen out there," Mrs. Hazlett worried. "They'll no doubt be too busy to stop for something hot to drink."

"They'll have to drink something hot, on a night like this," said Grandma.

"What do you say, we go down and see what is going on?" suggested Harry. The boys bundled

up and went down to the beach, where they looked out to where a black shape loomed up.

"Wish we could get out to it and see what is going on," said Jim.

Don gripped his arm. "There goes Jonathan Dean," he cried. "Let's go with him."

Dean had no objections to taking them out, especially as they agreed to pay him for it and in a few minutes they were in the whaleboat and headed out. It was a severely trying trip. Spray washed over the sides of the bobbing craft and instantly froze. Their oilskins became as hard as rocks and they were almost unable to bend their mittens, so stiff had they become. Ice formed in their eyebrows and on the tips of their noses. They had to move constantly to keep from being frozen to the seat. It was with a vast sense of relief that they approached the side of a big ship with the name *Rosa Mulholland* on it.

They climbed stiffly on deck, to be greeted by a discouraging sight. White ice held everything in a strong grip and the task of floating that ship seemed hopeless. The masts glistened with the coating of ice, the rigging sagged, the decks were risky and slippery. The crew from the station was at-

tacking an ice coated sail with an axe as they stood on the deck and looked around.

"Heeled over on her side," said Don, as they glanced around. "Must have some water in the hold, too. Some of the crew are on the pumps."

"Let's see what we can do," urged Douglas. "They must need some one to help with the coffee in the galley. At least down there we'll find heat."

But to their intense surprise there was no fire in the galley. The stove was a dejected sight, with the covers off and the ashes of the last fire showing starkly. There was no one around at the time, and they were at a loss for a moment.

"That's mighty funny," exclaimed Jim. "There is some fresh water, coffee and sugar. Don't see any milk, but we could get along without that. I wonder why there isn't any fire going?"

Before anyone could answer him Captain Douglas stood in the doorway. When he saw them his face lit up.

"Glad you boys came aboard," he cried. "I'm going to need you. All of the crew is busy and I want someone to get busy at the fire."

"Why isn't there any fire, Dad?" his son asked.

"Those fellows ran out of coal completely," the coast guard captain said. "There isn't a bit on the

ship, and they didn't have any wood handy. I want you boys to scout around and get wood for a fire. I don't care where you get it, as long as you do get it. If you can't find any in the hold, chop up some bunks, anything, as long as you get wood. If we don't have something hot immediately we will freeze to death. On the jump, now! Grab that axe back of you and get that wood as fast as you can!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE LETTER IN THE DESK

WITH that order from Captain Douglas the boys scattered in the quest for wood. Don was the nearest to the axe and he picked it up, hastening down the passageway to the hold. Once inside he looked around, striving to see what was in the place. The others were back of him, and halted when he did.

A swinging lantern hung from a beam and cast a flickering and uncertain gleam over a jumble of assorted boxes and crates. Don set up a shout.

"Just what we are looking for," he told the boys. "Some crates that we can break up. See if you can gather up any boards that are loose and I'll chop some up."

While the boys scattered to see if there were any loose boards to be picked up Don selected a heavy crate and attacked it vigorously with his axe. He had no idea what was in the case but Captain Douglas had said that nothing mattered except getting the material for a fire. It was a case of the necessities

of life against property rights, and it was no time to think of what might be in the crate before him.

His axe bit into the boards of the crate and he ripped off a piece of the side. When he had done that to two more he saw that there was a straight-backed chair in the case. It was evident that the *Rosa Mulholland* was carrying some furniture to someone, but when Don examined the chair closely he saw that it was not new. Taking care to preserve the chair itself from coming to harm he chopped away the entire case and Jim gathered up the wood.

"A load of furniture, eh?" his brother asked.

"Yes," nodded Don. "Old stuff, though."

Jim took the few pieces he had and started for the galley, leaving Don alone for the moment. Terry and Douglas had gone forward in their quest for wood. Don looked around him and selected a large and heavy crate for his next victim. The axe began its work of destruction there, and in time one side of a handsome old desk was disclosed.

"Must be a whole set of stuff," mused Don, throwing the splintered wood to one side. "Wonder where it is bound for? Here's a tag on the crate, let's see where it is going."

He took up the tag on the side of the crate and

received a surprise. On the tag was written: To James Odell, Marietta.

"Hello, this stuff belongs to Odell, right here," thought Don. "This schooner must have been going as far as Brockton, to unload there and send the furniture up to Marietta. I suppose this stuff is some old furniture that someone is leaving to Odell or perhaps it is some he owned himself some time ago."

The latter proved to be correct. A small drawer of the desk had been jarred open and some letters, dated years before, and bearing the name of James Odell, were disclosed. Don carefully closed the drawer and saw to it that it was secure. Then he went back to his work.

"I'll strip the crate off of this desk entirely and let it go at that," he decided. "There will surely be enough wood by that time. I'll have to be careful of the desk, too."

But no sooner had he made this resolution than he came to grief. He swung the axe at a side piece of the crate, missed it, and buried the sharp edge in the underside of the desk. He attempted to wrench it out, but without success.

"Shucks," he snorted. "I didn't mean to do that. I've ruined the thing, and I'm afraid that Odell

won't be any more pleased when he finds out I did it. Confound this axe, I can't get it out."

He placed his feet against the side of the desk and pulled. With a suddenness that was disconcerting the axe came out, and a bottom drawer with it. What looked to be the bottom of the desk was in reality a drawer, and it was impossible to tell it by looking at the outside of the desk.

"Humph," said Don. "A secret drawer, as sure as I live. What was in it?"

There was one letter in it, a yellow letter that was dated many years ago. It was to James Odell and was postmarked in Boston. Don picked it up out of the drawer and looked at it with interest.

"Some old letter," he thought. "I bet he doesn't even remember what it is all about. It isn't polite to look at other people's mail, but I'm mighty curious to know what kind of friends Odell had in those days. By George, it might even be from Doug's grandfather, and if so, it might contain something helpful. I'm going to look at the signature, anyway."

Terry and Harry had departed to the galley with wood and Don was now totally alone in the hold of the *Rosa Mulholland*. He opened the letter and turned to the bottom of the last sheet. In a faded

species of ink that looked brown the letter was signed by "Herman Gott."

"Nothing to do with Doug's grandfather," said Don, to himself. "So I won't even bother to read it."

While he was deciding that his eyes were idly wandering over a portion of the last paragraph. Now he was seized with astonishment and he read swiftly. The few words that he saw electrified him, and read as follows:

"—we've never been friendly, but I intend to let the matter rest unless you become unduly troublesome, Odell. In case you do I can convince you that it would be best to keep your mouth shut, or I am in a position to tell the world of a little dicker you put through with a lawyer named Parnes, relative to the false deed to Captain Clifford Hazlett's place, and you know what that will mean to you. So let's see to it that there is no further unpleasantness between us."

It was signed by Herman Gott.

For a long moment Don was lost in thought and amazement over his unexpected discovery. He had in his hand the evidence that would put Odell out of the big home and restore it to the rightful owners, the Hazletts, and the train of events by which it

had come into his hands was simply unbelievable. Justice was speaking for the brave captain who had gone down with his ship so many years ago, and the truth was working itself out as it always did.

Before he could open the letter and read it fully Terry called to him and he hastily thrust it into his pocket, determined to read it over when he got the chance. He picked up all of the wood which he had chopped, replaced the secret drawer in the Odell desk, and went to join his comrades in the galley.

He found that they had a snapping fire going and a grateful heat filled the tiny room. Jim had lost no time and a bubbling pot of coffee was on the top of the stove. Terry and Douglas were getting out cups for the men, and Don helped them. When enough cups had been procured they poured the coffee and took it to the men in the hold who were working on the leak and onto the deck to the men who were working to straighten things out. The hot beverage was received with shouts of gratitude.

"This just about saves our lives," said Captain Douglas. "We were freezing where we stood. Ah, here's good news!"

He pointed to where a large government patrol boat was heading toward them over the water. A call had been sent to the nearest coast guard base

and the patrol boat had hastened to the spot. To them would fall the task of towing the *Rosa Mulholland* into deeper water and standing by while it made an attempt to get under way once more. The work of the half-frozen life-saving crew was over, and they prepared to take to the surf boat.

The government boat drew alongside of the schooner and the captain formally took charge of the proceedings. The men from the station went back to the surf boat and started back to shore. Before they went the boys saw to it that the fire was going well and that plenty of coffee was ready for all hands. Then they entered the whaleboat with Dean and returned to the shore.

"Let's get back to the house," suggested Douglas, after they had paid Dean. "I was never so near to freezing before in all my life."

The others agreed with him perfectly and a rush was made for the cottage. Once inside of it they got out of their cold top clothes and hung around the fire in the living room talking until a very late hour. Don did not enter into the conversation, but thought constantly of the letter in his pocket.

There was a satisfaction in sitting there and knowing that he contained news that would electrify them all if it was told. He had enough evidence in

his possession to turn James Odell out of the big house which had never belonged to him, and place the rightful owners in the estate. But he was in no hurry about it. He wanted to find out a few things first.

"It might be well to find out just who this Herman Gott is," Don reflected. "He knows all about some crooked deal James Odell made with a lawyer to draw up a false bill of sale to that property. I judge that this all must have happened after Doug's grandfather went down, for I can't believe that Odell would have the nerve to do it while the captain was alive."

The date on the letter was eighteen years old. Don remembered that he had heard that the *Rose Hazlett* had gone down fully twenty years ago.

"Yes, it was done after the grandfather died," he thought.

When he got alone he read the letter through, but it did not give him any additional information. This Herman Gott had quarrelled with Odell over some business relations and Odell had apparently talked publicly of ruining Gott. The result was the letter which Don had found, hinting broadly that Herman Gott knew all of the details concerning the fraud in relation to the Hazlett property.

"I must make some effort to find this Herman Gott and perhaps the lawyer Parnes," reflected Don, just before he fell asleep that night. "They may give me some valuable information, or they may not. But even if they won't I can at least prove that there are such persons when the time comes for a showdown. This letter alone will completely ruin Odell in any court, but I realize that he is a mighty tricky sort of a fellow, and I don't want to give him a single loophole to slip out of."

CHAPTER XVIII

A STARTLING ORDER

DON was at a loss as to how to proceed for a time. He wanted to find out certain things without arousing suspicion, and to do that he must be very diplomatic. It was essential that he learn all he could about the men mentioned in the letter which he had found in the desk on the *Rosa Mulholland*.

But before he had time to make up his mind as to what course to pursue something unexpected happened. It was one evening just after supper

and they were sitting around in the living room. Outside the air was raw and cold and there was no reason to go out or to the station. The boys were sitting with the ladies in the living room, quietly chatting, when there was a heavy knock on the door.

Douglas got up from his chair and went to the door in the kitchen. Nearly everyone used either the back or side doors, reserving the front door always for state occasions. They heard Douglas speak in a low tone to someone and then the sound of their footsteps was heard approaching the room. A moment later and he ushered James Odell into the room.

"Good evening, Mr. Odell," greeted Grandma Hazlett, quietly.

"Good evening," grunted Odell, sweeping a look around at the assembled company. His glance lingered for a long fraction of a second on Terry's serene face and then he looked away.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Odell?" invited the younger Mrs. Hazlett.

Odell accepted the chair with a brief nod. Then he ignored the others and addressed himself to the grandmother.

"I'm afraid I have unpleasant news for you," he began, his face stern and frigid.

"What is it, Mr. Odell?" the old lady asked, without betraying any nervousness.

"You and your family will have to leave this house inside two weeks!" was the startling answer.

There was a moment of blank silence and astonishment. "Why, Mr. Odell," exclaimed Douglas' aunt. "You don't own this house. How can you tell us to get out?"

"In that you are mistaken," corrected Odell. "I do own this house. I bought it from Jerry Banks only last week."

"I see," nodded Grandma, calmly. "And so you have decided to put us out!"

"That is a low, scoundrelly trick, Odell!" cried Douglas, angrily.

"Wait a minute!" Odell raised his hand, his eyes snapping. "I want one of two things definitely understood before you begin to call me hard names. I have long wanted to own this cottage and the land on which it stands, and recently I saw my chance and purchased it. Am I to be blamed for that? Now, it so happens that I have friends who would like to locate near me, and I am forced, much against my will, to tell you that you must vacate the property as soon as possible."

He said it with a great air of earnestness but

there was a feeling of unbelief on the part of his hearers. Grandma fired a stinging shot.

"Sure it isn't your conscience that makes you want to see us go, James?" she asked.

Odell got up from his chair. "I don't know what you mean, Mrs. Hazlett," he said, coldly. "If you still persist in thinking that there is something wrong in my ownership of your former property, why, you are at perfect liberty to take it to court. My task tonight, an unpleasant one—and which you have made doubly unpleasant—was to tell you that I regret the fact that you must vacate. Good evening!"

In silence Odell was allowed to depart from the room, Douglas opening the back door for him. During the scene that had just passed Don had been tempted, more than once, to speak up, but he had wisely held his tongue. When Douglas returned the silence was broken.

"Dear me, must we leave our house?" sighed Aunt Laura.

"It's a perfect shame, but I don't see what we can do about it," declared Douglas, gloomily. "There is no doubt that he has bought the place and can do whatever he wants to with us."

"You can't tell me that it is because he wants

friends to occupy the place," affirmed Grandma, stoutly. "I think it is because every time he looks up the hill this way his conscience troubles him. James Odell is a very wicked man."

"How I shall hate to leave the place!" Martha moaned. "It has always been home to me and I won't feel right anywhere else. Where will we go?"

"Probably up to Marietta," said her mother. She turned to the grandmother. "After all, who would he have that would want to live here? You don't think he means Herman Gott, do you?"

Don's heart leaped within him and he listened intently. Old Mrs. Hazlett shook her head.

"No, James has been at odds with Herman Gott for years, over business matters," she replied. "Last I heard of Herman he was living on Bond Street, in Boston. No, it wouldn't be Herman."

"What business was this Herman Gott in?" Don asked. The others looked at him with some curiosity.

"Oh, he was in the shipping business years ago, and he knew Odell and my husband intimately," the grandmother explained. "He was neither friendly nor unfriendly with either of 'em. But he and Odell had some sort of a squabble and haven't been friends for years. For all I know Gott may be dead by now."

"Then Odell was living in Boston after the wreck of your husband's ship?" pressed Don.

"Yes, he lived there for a couple of years and then came down to put me out of my house down the hill. Now's he's putting me out of this one. Seems to be a favorite game of James Odell, to go puttin' me out of house and home."

She spoke quietly enough but there was a slight tremor in her voice that told the others how badly she really felt. Don longed to speak up and tell her that she would soon be able to move into the big house down the hill, but he fought off the temptation. He felt sure that there was more behind it all, and he wished to learn all that he could.

They talked for two hours over the situation, and the talk was not in the least cheerful. For years they had lived in the little cottage overlooking the ocean and it seemed like tearing up the roots of their hearts to move out of the place. It was a spot made sacred to them by memory, for Grandma could look out over the sea and look at the very spot where the *Rose Hazlett* had gone down, and it was conveniently close to the Daggerpoint Station.

"Wonder what Dad will think?" suggested Douglas.

Captain Douglas was roaring mad when he heard

of it on the following morning. But he realized that he was helpless.

"There isn't anything that can be done," he shrugged. "James Odell owns the place or he wouldn't take so much on his shoulders. Your moving will make things mean for me. Now I can get up to see you once in awhile, but when you move away I won't be able to get leave to go to Marietta very often."

"Too bad we didn't know the place was for sale long ago," put in Aunt Laura. "We could have all clubbed together and bought the house."

"That looks funny, on the face of it," declared the captain. "I don't believe that the house was ever publicly for sale. I'll bet Odell has been ding-ing Jerry Banks for months to get the place, and I don't believe that it was ever for friends, either."

The day after that Don got a letter from his father. It was in answer to one he had written and it contained nothing but news at home. But it gave him an idea and he proceeded to put it into effect at once.

Getting Jim alone one afternoon he told him the whole story and showed him the letter. Jim was greatly impressed and saw the possibilities.

"When are you going to show this thing?" he asked.

"Not until I have done a little searching. Do you recall the letter I got from Dad?"

"Sure."

"Well, I'm going to use that as an excuse to go to Boston. I want to look up this Herman Gott and make a personal appeal to him to come clean in the matter. I think he ought to. Perhaps he doesn't realize that all these years Grandma Hazlett has been living in a cottage while Odell has occupied her real home."

"Oh, he knows it," replied Jim. "He knows all about the crooked deed and the crooked lawyer named Parnes."

"Yes, but he may think that Odell only took over a piece of property and not know that he turned an unfortunate widow out of her own house. Anyway, when I tell him that Odell means to put the grandmother out of the cottage he'll tell me everything, if he is any kind of a man."

"Suppose he isn't?" Jim asked, pointedly.

"Then I'll fix him, if I can! First I'll tell him to his face what a snake he is and then I'll come back here, lay the matter fully before the captain and grandmother, and let them do as they think fit. If

I can, I'll have the whole story published in a Boston paper and how Herman Gott kept a low-down secret like that quiet for years will be told. If this Herman is a rich man or has a host of friends the story will hurt him and do him a lot of harm, especially with the right kind of people. I'll tell him so, too."

"That may make him talk," agreed Jim. "Listen, I think you had better not take that original letter to Boston with you. No telling what may happen to it, so you had better leave it here, with me. Someone may try to bluff you when you tell them that you have the letter, but you won't have to worry about being held up and having it taken away from you, anyway."

"No, and that is a good idea. I'll draw up a copy of it at once. I think I'll start for Boston tomorrow. In the meantime, you keep your weather eye peeled for trouble and I'll let you know where you can reach me by telegraph in case of anything out of the way turning up. Hang onto that letter for all you're worth until I get back."

"You bet I will," promised Jim. "That letter is going to crash James Odell's games once and for all. I wouldn't let anything happen to the letter for anything."

CHAPTER XIX

A VISIT TO BOSTON

WHEN Don mentioned his desire to go to Boston for a business trip no surprise was expressed by those at the cottage. They knew that he had received a letter from home, and besides that, other matters occupied their minds. The thought of leaving the little home was just then the only thought of importance.

So Don left the house early one morning and the boys drove him over to Marietta in the carriage. At that point he caught a train for Boston and after an uneventful trip landed in the Hub City. Don was not a stranger in the city, as he had visited it before, and while he did not know his way all around he was able to find his way around well enough to keep him out of difficulty. On a previous visit Don had stopped with a man named Ferris, and it was to the Ferris home that he now made his way.

Mr. Ferris was at home at the time and received him kindly. Don explained that he had just dropped

into the city on a matter of business and that he wished to be directed to Bond Street. Mr. Ferris knew where the street was, but he had never heard of Herman Gott.

"Bond Street is over in the Sea Wall section of town," the business man told him. "I have never heard of Herman Gott, however. You don't know what business he was in?"

"Years ago he was in the shipping business," said Don. "I don't know what business he is in now. I want to hunt him up and have a talk with him on some matters of business. I'm much obliged to you for your information as to the location of the street."

Don had intended to put up all night at a hotel, but the Ferris family would not hear of it, and compelled him to spend the night with them. In the morning Mr. Ferris once more told Don where the street was and then the boy set out on his quest.

A street car took him across town to the section for which he was looking and when he had reached it he had no difficulty in finding Bond Street. At that point his search really began, for he did not even know what number was on the house occupied by the man he was seeking. His plan was to look at the houses first and gather some estimate of what

they looked like and what sort of people lived in them.

"If this Herman Gott was a big shipper it is possible that he lived in some fine house," Don had decided. "Of course, I must realize that it was years ago that Grandma Hazlett knew he lived on Bond Street. However, I'll just have to do my best."

Bond Street was a quiet old residential street in one of the oldest sections of Boston. Fortunately, it was not long, and Don walked up and down it in less than a half hour. But he was unable to learn anything definite from the houses themselves. They were decidedly old and had been built forty and fifty years previous. Some of them showed that respectable families dwelt in them, others had been allowed to run to seed and showed the signs of utter neglect. Out of the entire block he picked eight houses that might have served as the home of a shipper of some importance. At last he entered a drug store.

"Now to consult the directory," he thought. Opening that important book he looked under the letter G until he came to Gott. There were four Gotts listed and one of them was Herman. To his joy the address was 135 Bond Street.

"This directory is only five years old," he ob-

served. "He lived at 135 at least up to that time, and probably lives there yet. I'll step around and try my luck. "

He walked up Bond Street until he came to number 135, a big, roomy old place that had been well taken care of. A long walk led up to the front door and Don mounted the steps, pulled the bell and waited with a rapidly beating heart.

"Now that I'm right on top of it, I don't feel so confident," he smiled.

His ring was answered by a tall woman dressed entirely in black who opened the door noiselessly. Don lifted his hat politely.

"Good morning," he said. "Does Mr. Herman Gott live here?"

The woman stared at him for a single instant. "Mr. Gott died two weeks ago," she said. "I am his sister. Is there anything I can do for you?"

The wind was taken completely out of Don's sails. He had not counted on any such possibility and he was at a total loss. The elderly lady was regarding him with much curiosity.

"Why, er, no, I'm afraid not," he finally stammered. "I—I wanted to see Mr. Gott. I didn't know that he was dead, and I'm sorry to hear it."

"What did you want with Mr. Gott?" the lady asked.

"I wanted to see him concerning a business matter," replied Don, truthfully.

The lady looked at him with growing suspicion. "Mr. Gott had been confined to bed for a number of years, and had not been engaged in any business. What business did you have with my brother?"

Don was getting in deeper all the time and an inspiration seized him. He remembered that there had been other Gotts in the directory.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I must surely have the wrong Gott. May I ask what business your brother was engaged in?"

"The shipping business," his sister answered.

"Then I must surely have the wrong Mr. Gott," smiled Don, though he knew that it was the one he had come to seek. "I beg your pardon for taking up your time. Good morning."

He walked away before the sister had time to say anything more and hastened down the street. He heard a door close in the house he had just left, and breathed a sigh of relief.

"So Herman Gott is dead, eh?" he reflected. "I wonder if Odell knows that? He must, and I'll bet he ordered the Hazlett's out as soon as he knew

about it. If I'm not mistaken this Herman Gott held a mighty close check rein over James Odell.

Struck by a new idea Don again entered the drug store and looked in the directory. This time he looked up the name Parnes. He found it and it was evidently the one he was seeking, for the man was a lawyer. Don wrote down the street and address and then inquired of the clerk where the street was. Finding that it was close at hand he set out to find it and had no trouble in doing so.

It was in the section devoted to business and he had no difficulty in finding the offices of Daniel Parnes. It was a tiny place in the basement of a large building and Don wondered if that could be the man for whom he was looking. But the directory had listed but one Parnes as a lawyer, and Don entered the place. Mr. Parnes was not in, it developed, so he sat down to wait. The circumstance was favorable, for it gave him time to map out a plan of campaign.

Mr. Parnes came in at last. He was a very old man and looked as though life had not dealt very kindly with him. His hair was gray, his face lined, and he was stooped over. A bitter look dwelt on his face and his manner was sharp when he greeted Don.

"Sit down here," he directed, pointing to a seat beside his desk. "Now, what can I do for you, young man?"

"Did you know a man named Herman Gott?" Don asked.

The lawyer looked at him with narrowed eyes. "Yes, I did. He's dead."

"I know that," nodded Don. "And did you know James Odell and Clifford Hazlett years ago?"

The old man stiffened and bent forward, bending a glance that was full of bitterness on Don's face. "What do you want to know for?"

"I won't be able to tell you that," returned Don, quietly. "However, I guess there isn't any reason why you shouldn't answer, is there?"

It was a fair question and the old man was stumped by it. But he was suspicious and on his guard.

"No, there isn't any reason. But I don't go in for telling things unless I know why I'm asked them," he returned.

"I happen to know both James Odell and the widow of Captain Hazlett," was Don's reply. "I knew that Herman Gott was a friend of theirs, and I called at the Gott house this morning, only to learn that he had died recently."

"He died two weeks ago. And he wasn't a friend of either Clifford Hazlett or James Odell. He was at one time, but they had some business dealings later on that soured him, and he never had anything to do with either of them later on."

"Was Herman Gott a friend of yours?" Don asked.

"Years ago, yes, but later on Herman lost all of his friends. But listen here, young man, I want to know why you are asking all these questions? You are asking about things that happened a good many years ago, and that looks funny."

"Is there any reason why you shouldn't want to answer questions about what happened years ago?" Don asked, pointedly.

Parnes' face turned red. "I want to know who you are and if you don't tell me I'll make plenty of trouble for you," he cried.

"I can't tell you anything about myself," declared Don. "I came here to ask you a few questions, and the one I would like to know the most is this: does James Odell know that Herman Gott is dead?"

"I don't know, I haven't seen nor heard of James Odell for years," the crabbed lawyer said. "Who are you? Do you work for a newspaper?"

"No," said Don. "I don't. As I told you before, Mr. Parnes, I can't tell you who I am."

Parnes reached out and pulled the telephone toward him. His eyes burned with suspicion as he glared at the boy.

"All right, young fellow," he snapped. "I'm going to call the police and have you locked up until I find out who you are!"

Don only grinned. He was secure in his own position, and knew that if the worst came to the worst he could easily get out of trouble. He had the man before him cornered, although Parnes did not know it.

"What charge will you have me locked up on, Mr. Parnes?" he asked, coolly.

"I can say that you came in here and threatened me," returned the old lawyer. "No body will believe you if you say you didn't. Anyway, you as good as threatened me, by asking me all these fool questions."

"If that is the case, I am going to threaten you," promised Don, a new ring in his voice. "You had better not call for the police, Mr. Parnes. I have proofs that show a dicker you entered into years ago with James Odell regarding a piece of property down near the Daggerpoint Coast Guard Station. If you

think it a good plan to call in the police you go ahead and do it, but I promise you that you'll wish you had left the police out of it!"

The shot went home. Parnes became white in the face and his hands dropped lifelessly away from the telephone. In a single moment his face seemed to have aged years. Don got up and put on his hat.

"That is all I'm going to say right now, Mr. Parnes," Don said. "I don't know if anything more will come of the thing or not. But if you think the dishonest work you did twenty years ago is buried forever, you have another guess coming. I haven't lived so very long, Mr. Parnes, but I have lived long enough to find out that dishonesty always seems to come back sometime and catches those that practise it. Goodbye."

"Here! Come back here, boy! Listen, ——"

But Don was gone. He had learned all that he wished to know. Daniel Parnes had not admitted by any word that he had been party to anything dishonest in years gone by, but his face had told it more convincingly than any words could have done. Don felt that his mission was complete.

"I don't see how Odell can get out of the trap I have for him now," Don decided, as he went to the station. "The letter will convict him alone. I be-

lieve that as soon as he heard that Herman Gott was dead he proceeded to buy the cottage and order the Hazlett's out of it. Well, I guess we have him where we want him now. The best thing for me to do is to get out of Boston before anything happens to me. Parnes may think I have valuable letters on me, and there is no telling what he will do."

Stopping only long enough to telephone Mr. Ferris and telling him of his intention of returning, to which he added his warm thanks, Don took a train at noontime and arrived at Marietta about supper time. From there he walked to the cottage.

CHAPTER XX

THE BLACK LAUNCH

WHEN Don got back the others had just finished their supper. He had stopped long enough to get himself a bite to eat in the village, a procedure for which Martha scolded him heartily. He joined the boys in the living room.

"Have any luck on your trip?" Douglas asked.

"Yes," nodded Don. Jim looked satisfied. Lowering his voice, Don looked all around.

"I have something to tell all of you fellows. Where can we go so as not to excite comment?"

"We can go for a walk down to the station," suggested Douglas. "It is a nice night out and we can walk off our suppers."

"All right, let's go. I can tell you what I want to outside."

The boys put on their coats and hats and left the kitchen much in the manner of going down to the station for a brief visit. They did go in the direction of the station, but once down the slope of the hill they turned in another direction and walked to where Jonathan Dean's whaleboat was pulled up on the sand. Its owner was not about at the moment and they sat down on the side of it which was dry.

"Now, let's have it," urged Douglas.

Don started at the beginning, telling of the finding of the letter and ending with the details of his trip to Boston. His hearers were amazed and joyous.

"Why, by Jupiter, that's the best news I ever heard!" whooped Douglas.

"That Odell will find his teeth pulled now," grinned Terry.

"So Herman Gott is dead?" murmured Jim. "I

suppose that is the reason why Odell dared to order the family out."

"Possibly," agreed Don. "He may have been afraid to do anything like it before, for fear that some news would reach this Gott, who would be only too glad to expose him. But I'm beginning to think that Herman Gott wouldn't have wanted the general public to know that he was aware of this nasty mess all these years and had said nothing."

"I think you are right there," Douglas nodded. "Anyway, there is no doubt that Parnes gave the whole thing away by his looks. This will be splendid news for my folks."

"It will, but I am going to ask you not to let them know about it for a time," said Don. Douglas pulled a long face.

"Must they go on worrying about things?" he grumbled.

"No," denied Don, positively. "I will tell them that I have learned something that will make it impossible for Odell to put them out of the cottage and that they are not to worry. But we won't say a thing about the fact that before long they will be back in the big estate at the bottom of the hill."

"Gee!" exclaimed Douglas, his eyes shining. "We're going back to the estate, are we? I've never

even been in the place, you know. That will certainly be a big kick."

"Do you mean to wait until Odell comes and tells them to get out?" Jim asked.

"Yes," Don replied. "Pretty soon he will come storming up to demand if any progress is being made toward leaving the house and then we'll just show our hand and give him our notice to vacate!"

"That will be a come-back like a mule's kick!" laughed Terry, gleefully.

"He has it, and more, coming to him, of course. Now, if by any chance we should get a recall to school we'll invite him to the cottage and show him the letter I have before hand. We want to see this thing through."

"Sure we do," Douglas agreed. "Well, I'll let you talk to the ladies, Don."

When they went back to the house all dish washing had been done and the three ladies sat in the living room. Grandma was placidly knitting, Aunt Laura was reading the day's paper, and Martha was stroking a pet cat. At the sight of this quiet family spending a calm, happy evening together Don's heart beat a bit faster and he was thankful that he had been so lucky as to come across the letter on the *Rosa Mulholland*.

The boys sat down quietly and Douglas spoke up. "Don has something to tell you," he said.

The ladies looked up with some curiosity. Don spoke quietly and to the point.

"I have some news that will hearten you quite a bit, I guess," he began. "You must not worry any longer about vacating this cottage. You won't have to leave it."

They looked at him in dawning hope and perplexity. "Why won't we?" the grandmother asked, sharply.

"For the present I am going to ask you not to press me for the reason," Don told them. "You all know that I went to Boston today on business. Well, as it happened, it was your business! I know that sounds funny, but I got an idea when I heard how James Odell had ordered you out of the cottage, and I decided to follow it up. So I went to Boston, saw certain people, and you will not have to leave your home here at any time."

"Good land of livin'!" exclaimed Aunt Laura. "Do you really mean that?" Martha had ceased to pet the cat and the grandmother's knitting had dropped unheeded into her lap.

"Yes, I do. I am going to ask that you don't press me for details just yet. When Odell comes over here

again to ask you when you are going to move I shall reveal everything. I rather hope that he will get the shock of his life when he does so."

"Dear me!" cried the little old lady. "You made that trip all the way to Boston just to find out about the sale of this place? But how could that be? The man James Odell bought it of lives right here in Marietta."

"Yes, I guessed that," Don nodded. "But I found out a thing or two in Boston. For one thing, I visited Herman Gott!"

The old lady and Aunt Laura started and looked searchingly at the boy. "Herman Gott!" cried the aunt. "Is it Herman Gott that is going to come and live here?"

Don could not refrain from smiling. "No, for Herman Gott is dead."

"He is dead?" the grandmother inquired.

"Yes, he died two weeks ago. No, he isn't going to live here, in fact no one is but yourselves. There, that is all I want to say now. I have good reasons for not wanting to say any more, and you must trust me."

"Trust you!" exclaimed Martha, looking warmly at him. "I should say we do trust you!"

"My sakes alive, yes. We feel all the gratitude

in the world to you," added the grandmother. "It was a sore blow to me to think of moving at my time of life. I can't see how it is that we won't have to, but I won't ask you any more."

"That will be better," smiled Don. "I think you'll all be glad that I withheld it, when the proper time comes. James Odell has done a good many crooked things in his life, but at least some of them are coming back at him now."

"It is about time," the aunt said, with energy. "I wish to goodness something would come out about his getting that property down the hill."

"Well, maybe that will come out someday, too," suggested Douglas, with a quick wink at the boys.

"It was so nice of you to go all the way to Boston to look up this matter," Martha assured Don. "Is that the only reason you went?"

"Yes, that was the only reason," he confessed.

"That was more than nice of you," the old lady said, as she resumed her knitting. "Young man, I hope your mother will never be forced to move by some dishonest critter like Odell, but if she is I hope some fine boy like you bobs up to save her from trouble!"

The conversation was becoming too uncomfortable for Don and he quickly changed the theme. But

it was impossible for him to change their feelings toward him. He was glad when it came time to turn in.

Captain Douglas visited the house on the following day and he was impressed when the grandmother told him what Don had done. He could not guess what Don had learned in Boston.

"Mighty smart set of boys," was his only comment. "Hope to Goshen that I'm around when this fellow Odell calls next time."

The following night was clear and cold, with no moon or stars. After supper the boys found the cottage a trifle hot and they were restless. Douglas proposed that they go for a walk along the beach.

"We'll walk up toward the Bayberry Hill Station," he suggested, as they bundled up.

So they started up that way along the shore. The air was bracing and strong and they enjoyed it after the warmth of the house. They took the outer beach, walking down close to the incoming waves, which rolled often to the edges of their shoes. All around them was a vast silence, except for the pounding of the surf.

"There is Odell's house," remarked Don, pointing to the big estate, dark and silent against the shore.

"But it won't be his place much longer," breathed Douglas. "It is certainly going to be great to move into our own house!"

"Let's skirt around the back of it," suggested Terry. None of them had any desire to walk along the beach immediately in front of the place, so they turned inland and climbed the dunes back of the big piece of property. From the top of the dunes they could look down on the house and the barn.

"Doesn't seem to be anyone at home," remarked Jim.

"Probably all in bed," replied Douglas. "People in this section don't stay up long."

"But it is pretty early," Don pointed out. "Only eight o'clock, you know."

"That is true," nodded Douglas. "Well, perhaps they are all over at the town. Do you know, that place has never been much in the way of a home, as far as I could ever see. At the most two or three windows have been lighted and there was never any signs of life in the place. It seems more like some tomb than anything else. Certainly it has never been the kind of a home my grandfather meant it to be."

"How many live in the place?" Terry asked.

"Just the three Odells, mother, father and son. That constitutes the family, and I believe that there

are two servants. When we get into the place I'm sure we can make it more like a home."

They passed on and once more took to the outer beach, walking far up the shore. In due time they reached the Bayberry Station but did not go in, for they were not as familiar with the place as they were with the Daggerpoint Station. There was no doubt that they would have been welcome, for the men knew of their work with the beach patrol, but they merely walked on to the Three Point Lighthouse, watched the flashing of the light for a few minutes, and then turned back.

"Guess we had better start back," Douglas suggested, looking at his watch. "It is getting late and I for one am tired."

They tramped back along the shore, talking aimlessly of different matters that occupied their minds. Jim had been looking out to sea and finally spoke up.

"Look here, you fellows, do my eyes deceive me, or do I see a boat out there, scudding along the water?"

The boys halted and peered out to sea in the direction that Jim indicated. At first they could not make out anything, but finally managed to see a small launch some distance out on the water. It was mov-

ing parallel with the shore and at a considerable speed.

"Yes, it is a motor launch," decided Don. "But whoever they are they have the engine muffled down in fine style. You can barely hear it."

Only the faintest sounds came from the swiftly moving launch. As they watched it the course of the craft was altered and it began to approach the shore on a long angle. Terry voiced the feeling in the minds of all of them.

"She is sailing without a light on her," he said. "Now, what is the idea of that?"

"Looks mighty funny to me," Douglas said. "Come on, let's follow her course along the shore."

Accordingly, they hastened along the shore, keeping the mysterious launch in view. But as it approached the shore they decided that prudence was the best plan and took to the dunes, where the irregularities of the sand hid them from view.

"We're better off out of sight," Don decided. "It looks to me as though something funny is up. Why should a launch run along the shore with her engine muffled and her lights out?"

"You have me there," Jim confessed. "Well, we're close to Odell's place, and unless I am greatly mistaken that launch is putting into his dock."

Jim was not mistaken. Without a sound the silent launch slid into the long reach of Odell's dock.

CHAPTER XXI.

MEN IN THE DARK

THE boys were now awake to the fact that something unusual was going on. At Don's suggestion they crouched down behind a sand dune and watched.

"Could it be Barry Odell coming home from a sail?" Terry asked.

"I doubt it," Douglas returned. "If it is, why should he come sailing in with engine muffled and lights out?"

"Might be afraid of a call-down from his pop!" chuckled Terry.

"No, I guess something deeper than that is going on," Jim said.

Although the light was faint they could gain a fairly good view of the dock, the house and the grounds immediately around them. Their interest centered on the boat, however, and before long they were rewarded.

Three men stepped out onto the dock and a fourth joined them a few minutes later. While the three men waited the fourth walked along the dock and approached the Odell house. But to the surprise of the watching boys he did not go to the door of the place, but with easy confidence walked around the building and went toward the barn.

"He's been here before," whispered Don.

The man stopped at the barn door and appeared to be unlocking the door, for they saw him dip his hand into his pocket and after a few minutes he dipped it back again. The door was then opened and he stepped inside, to remain there for a full two minutes. When he did come out he was alone and he made his way down to the dock with sure steps. At that point he spoke to the three shadows there and then all of them stepped down into the launch. One of them appeared again in a moment with a hundle in his arm and started toward the house, the second and then the other two followed.

"Bringing bundles toward the house," Terry whispered.

But before they got to the house they turned off into a darker stretch of beach yard and made a detour toward the barn. Reaching the door they went in one by one and it was a few minutes before they

came out again. Back to the launch they went and loaded up, to return to the barn by the roundabout way again. This was repeated several times, and then all four men went into the barn, closing the door after them.

"What do you make of it, Doug?" Don whispered while they waited.

"Smuggling!" was the prompt answer.

"That is what I thought. But what do you suppose it was that they were carrying?"

"I haven't any idea. There are a good many things that can be smuggled. After they have gone we'll have to see if we can't find out what it was."

"So the Odells are smuggling, eh?" said Terry. "Well, I'm not surprised."

"No, and I guess I see how it is done, too," put in Jim. "When they know something is to be run they either go to bed early or go to town, so that they won't know anything about it. That's the idea, don't you think?"

"That's about the size of it," Don returned. "Those fellows are taking a long time in the barn."

They remained in the barn a good fifteen minutes, during which time the boys waited impatiently. At last the men opened the door, the leader locked it and they went silently down to the black launch. There

was a purring sound, the nose of the launch swung outward in a wide circle, and the mysterious craft was gone at a swift pace. The boys watched it until it passed from sight down the coast.

"Now, what shall we do?" Douglas asked. "We have enough evidence to put Odell where he belongs, but I would like to see what it is that those fellows just put in his barn."

"So would I" agreed Jim. "Shall we make an attempt to get into the barn?"

"There may be a lot of danger in it," Terry suggested.

"We're used to danger," returned Don. "I know that it will most likely go hard with us if we are caught in the place by Odell. But I won't be satisfied unless I see what it was that the men brought ashore, so I say let's break in."

"Do you remember the barn well enough to remember if there is any place to get into, Terry?" Douglas asked.

The red-headed boy shook his head. "No, I don't. Unfortunately, I didn't look for such details when I went into the place. You are going to approach the back of the barn, of course?"

"Oh, yes," decided Don. "If there is anyone at home in the house we wouldn't want them to see us

prowling around. We might be in line for a shot, and we don't care to have anything like that happen. Now, let's keep to the dunes and make our way around to the back of the barn."

Taking care to keep well below the level of the sand hills the boys crept around in back of the barn. At last they were safe, with the big building between them and the house. The barn had been built on a huge scale and consisted of two stories, the upper half being the loft from which Luke Hughes had jumped at the time of the fight between Terry and Barry. From the bottom of the barn the boys examined the place for an opening.

"Four windows," announced Jim. "All of them look solid, but you never can tell. They are a little higher than my head, so you fellows had better give me a boost."

They lifted him up and Jim tried the windows in turn. With the exception of one of the middle ones they were all solid. The one weak one did not promise much, for it merely rattled slightly and it was locked.

"I may be able to open the lock of that window with a knife," said Jim, when they had lowered him. "Say, we had better be more careful about this business. Someone could walk right around the

corner and have us. Suppose someone stands guard?"

"I'll slip around the corner and watch the house and the yard," volunteered Terry, and went off at once.

Jim got out his knife, opened the blade and then placed the handle in his teeth. "Now, you fellows give me another boost. If we are going to get into this barn it will be through this particular window."

They raised him again and he went to work on the window with his knife. He found that the blade of the knife entered into the crack between the upper and lower portions of the window for a fraction of an inch. It was necessary to work the blade backward and forward slowly, and it was hard on the two who were holding him up. Realizing this, Jim jumped down and gave them a rest.

"How is it coming?" Don whispered.

"All right; I'll have it in a few minutes, I'm sure. Once the blade touches the catch on the frame it will turn back."

They hoisted him up again and he went to work once more. This time he worked the blade up and at last the tip of it was touching the lock on the window. Jim pushed hard against the lock, it resisted him for a moment, but at last it turned back, un-

locking the window. Putting the knife back in his pocket he raised the window softly.

"I got it!" he whispered down to them. With this word he drew himself up and sat on the window sill, looking down into the blackness of the barn.

It was pitch black inside and silent. There was not even enough light with which to make out a single object and he knew that their exploration would have to be in the darkness. While he looked in Don was boosted up and joined him on the ledge.

"Help me haul Douglas up," his brother said.

Douglas had vanished around the barn, to reappear a moment later with Terry. He gave the red-head the necessary shove upward and the three of them were barely able to fit on the sill.

"I'll get down inside, so you can pull Doug up," said Jim, in a low voice.

"Be careful what you land on," cautioned Don.

"Sure. Give me a hand down, so I don't go thumping over something."

Clasping the hands which Don and Terry extended to him Jim was lowered to the floor of the barn, which he found without any trouble. He remained where he was without moving while Terry and Don lowered their hands and hauled Douglas to the window sill. From there they dropped into

the barn one by one, joining Jim on the floor.

"Now that we are here, how do we go?" Don asked, carefully.

"We have got to have some sort of a light," replied Terry. "No use in blundering around in the dark, because we might get hurt. "I'll strike a match."

"Be mighty careful," warned Don.

Terry scratched a match, shading the glow with his free hand. It showed them the big ground floor of the barn, with the stalls on the far side, two of which were tenanted by horses. The third was empty and the carriage room was also empty, showing them that the Odells were out.

"Odell is out somewhere in the carriage," said Douglas. "And he might return at any moment. I'll keep a look out of the front window and warn you if he comes. Meanwhile, let's place this box under the window, so that we can make a quick get-away if he does come."

"Yes, and suppose we make up a plan of action?" put in Don. "So as not to cause confusion Jim will go out of the window first, Terry will follow him, I'll follow and you go last. Each fellow will skin out on the double-quick. All right?"

They agreed that it was, and Douglas went to

the front window of the barn, there to watch the back of the house. Don found a lantern and lighted it, keeping the dark side of it toward the front windows. Then they searched the barn.

But to their intense astonishment they found nothing. A number of bundles had been brought into the place but there was not a sign of them now. They searched the hayloft, and fortunately for their purpose there was very little hay in the place. This saved them the trouble of looking under it, and what there was was so flat that no looking there was necessary. There were two small rooms on the upper floor, but they contained nothing besides tools and some discarded books.

"Well, this beats me," murmured Terry, as they made their way down the stairs in the carriage room.

"Any luck?" Douglas hailed softly, as they entered the main floor room.

"Not a thing," returned Don, disgustedly. "Those bundles have disappeared completely!"

"They couldn't do it," said Douglas, stoutly. "They were brought in here."

Jim walked to a pile of six oat bags that stood close to the stalls of the horses. These bags were full and piled in a strange formation. Four of them lay on the floor and two of them stood on top of the

bottom four. Without saying anything Jim heaved the bags from him one by one. When the last one went rolling he whistled triumphantly.

"Just what I thought!" he told them. "Here is a ring in the floor. There is a cellar in this barn!"

CHAPTER XXII

UNDER ODELL'S BARN

JIM's announcement caused much excitement among the four boys. Douglas left his post at the window and joined them around the ring in the plank floor.

"Yes, there must be a cellar under the place," Don agreed. "At least there is a trap door here. Let's lift it up."

He bent down and took hold of the ring, the others coming to his assistance. Even with all of them tugging it took considerable effort to raise that door, but it came up and swung back. It was on hinges and they placed it back on the floor, at the same time looking down while Don flashed the lantern. A short flight of thick stairs was disclosed.

"A regular little vault," breathed Terry.

Don tested the top step. "Good and strong, so come on down. I guess we have the key to the mystery at last," he said.

Following Don and the rays of light the boys descended into the vault that served as a cellar for the place. It did not extend under the entire barn, they found, but it took in only that space under the stalls and the carriage shed. Originally it might have been built for storage of various sort, but now it was used for a different purpose. Once on the cement floor they looked around with interest.

On all sides of them shelves had been built against the wall and close together. They had been built from the floor to the floor of the barn and most of them were now laden with long bundles like those which the men had carried up from the black launch. Heavy tarred paper covered the bundles and when Douglas turned back the covers piles of shiny silk were exhibited. Silks of various colors flashed back at the yellow rays of the lamp.

"Silk, eh?" mused Jim, inspecting it. "So Odell is in the silk smuggling business, is he?"

"He appears to be," Terry retorted, briefly.

"From the looks of things, it is a good business," said Don. "From what I can see there are several

hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars worth of silk stored here. Somehow or other he must get rid of it at his own convenience."

"Now that we have found it, what are we going to do about it?" Jim asked.

"I think we will tell my father the whole story and let him advise us," said Douglas. "He will know just how to go about it. This Odell must be pretty clever to keep this up and never be suspected."

"Yes, your dad has never said anything to you about any smuggling around here, has he?" asked Don.

"No, I haven't heard a word of it. I know that there is always some sort of smuggling going on all along the coast, but I never heard of any of it being done in this particular part of the country."

"Well, some of it is certainly going on—" began Terry, when an unexpected sound caused them to freeze into silence.

Someone was right above them and was coming through the opening over their heads. Frightened as he was Don flashed the light up and they all felt like crying with relief when they saw who it was.

It was Luke Hughes who was walking down the steps toward them.

"Ahoy, mates," he greeted, with a quizzical smile on his face.

"Ahoy, yourself!" returned Douglas, with relief. "Oh, man, how you scared us!"

"I don't doubt it," nodded the sailor. "I guess I'd shiver my own timbers if I was caught in a place like this. You fellows run a fine risk, lookin' around this place."

"We knew that," Don told him. "But we just had to see what was going on in this place. We were out walking on the sand when we saw a black launch tie up to the dock and some men brought bundles in here. When they had gone we got into the place and looked around."

"I know it," nodded Hughes. "I was watching you!"

"You were watching us?" asked Terry.

"Yes, and I saw you come into this barn. I followed you through the window, and I have locked the front door of the barn. If Odell comes home he isn't goin' to walk in on our party."

"That is what we should have done in the first place," admitted Douglas.

"I've got this, if we should run into heavy trouble," went on Hughes, showing them a short

and wicked-looking revolver. "So you needn't a-worry yourselves."

"That reassures us quite a bit," smiled Don. "Odell has been in the smuggling game, Mr. Hughes,"

"Yes, I know that," replied the sailor. "I have been watchin' this place for some weeks." He turned to Terry. "You remember the day I jumped out of the hayloft?"

"I remember the evening," returned Terry, grinning.

"That's so, 'twas evenin'. Well, I was hidin' up there for a purpose. I had been hidin' around here for a few days and one black night I saw the same thing you boys saw tonight, that black launch. I watched it unload and waited around until the barn was left open the next day. I sneaked in and stayed here for a few days, collectin' helpful information for myself. I have enough now to send James Odell where he belongs."

"Then you have been in here before?" asked Don, waving his hands around the vault.

"Yes, a couple of times. When I knew they was away from the house I visited the place. They have had two shipments of silk since I have been on the lookout, and tonight makes the third."

"But how does he get rid of it?" Jim asked.

"He takes it out bolt by bolt. When you see him drivin' up the road so innocent-like he really has a roll of silk under the seat of the carriage. I've seen him put a bolt under there, cover it up and then drive out to town. He must have a confederate up in the town who takes it from him, for after a couple of days goes by he drives up with another bunch of it."

"Wonder how long that has been going on?" Terry mused.

"I don't know that," answered Hughes, inspecting some of the new bundles. "But I judge he has been in the game for a long time. This cellar is pretty well covered up and no one would ever think of lookin' for it. I guess we have put a spoke in Jimmie Odell's wheel that will stop him once and for all."

"Well, it is about time," said Douglas. "Are you ready to place the information in the proper hands?"

"Just about," nodded the man. "Now that I have you boys to back me up, I don't see why not. I've got more than one thing to pin on James Odell and make him squirm."

"The night you dropped in my fight was quite a surprise to me," grinned Terry.

Hughes slapped his thigh. "That was some fight youngster! I was up in the hay when that Odell boy

come into the barn with the case, and I lay there over the loft opening and watched him working to open it. Something about that case sort of het me up, and I was going to jump down on him when you hove in sight and challenged him. By godfrey mighty! that was a beautiful scrap! You handed it to him in wonderful style!"

"By the way," asked Don. "What did you find in that case? Anything?"

The man looked at them in silence for a second. "You boys'll never guess. Honest, it was the most astonishin' thing I ever comes across, and I ain't got to believe it fully, yet."

"What was it?" Douglas persisted.

"Why, boys, that was the identical case that Captain Clifford Hazlett handed to me on the night the *Rose Hazlett* went down outside the bar twenty years ago!"

"Get out!" cried Jim.

"But," objected Don. "The diver brought that thing up from the bottom of the ocean. According to what you told us——"

"I know it," interposed the sailor. "I told you that Captain Hazlett handed that thing to me, that Odell reached for it and knocked me out of the boat and overboard. Well, boys, either Jimmie Odell

threw it over the side of the boat, believing it was no good, or he dropped it, for in that case was the deed to the house James Odell is living in, along with a couple of other valuable papers belongin' to the old captain!"

The boys were stunned by the news. It seemed to them beyond belief. Hughes went on: "I have the papers, and I'm going to flash them on Odell pretty soon. The case was waterproof and they was still as good as the day that Captain Hazlett put 'em in the case. What I think happened was this: I think that after Odell give me that shove he dropped that case overboard, down to the bottom of the sunken reef. I can't imagine Jimmie Odell throwin' away anything, and I think he knew better than I did just what was in that particular case. Maybe he had seen the captain put the papers in the thing, because when the skipper passed that box to me that night he sort of went crazy. Jumped up and grabbed for it, shovin' me right overboard to get it. But he must have lost his hold on it and dropped it overboard."

"And then, some twenty years later, a diver finds it on the mud at the bottom of the ocean," murmured Terry.

"Yes, sir, and don't that beat all! I knew that

schooner had sunk about the same spot as the *Rose Hazlett* went down and I saw that barge out there with the diver on board. I don't think that Barry boy had any idea what was in that case when he reached for it, but he may have thought it was a string of pearls in it or somethin' valuable, so he took a chance and reached out for it, just like his pa did years ago. But the Odells don't have no luck when they reach out for anything, do they, Terry?"

"No, sir," replied Terry, innocently, and Odell's enemy chuckled.

"When you and Odell and his son gave chase that night I had to leg it some for a hideout I had back in the dunes," he explained. "I run across a little hut there and I kept well out of sight, because I knew that Odell would be lookin' high up and low down for me. But I managed to keep out of his hands, good luck."

"If we don't get out of here we may spoil all our luck," Jim reminded them.

"Right you are," nodded Luke, starting up the steps. "It won't do to let Odell know that we are on to his game here. Come one piece of bad luck and we'll lose all the ground we have gained. Let's get out."

They followed Hughes up the ladder and replaced

the door in the floor. When they had made it look as though no one had disturbed it they proceed to cover the place with the bags of feed which Jim had first thought suspicious. When this was done there was nothing to show that anything had ever been tampered with.

"Does Odell always go out when the smugglers come?" Douglas asked.

"That's his game," Luke nodded. "The whole family goes away and the house is dark. Either the servants are in on it or they go away too, for there is never a sound from the house, and those fellows walk all around the place without anybody hailin' them. Then, when it is all over the Odells come back home as though nothin' had happened."

"Hadn't you better take the lock off of the door?" Don suggested.

"So I will," the sailor responded. "If they hove in port and found the door locked they would be mighty suspicious, wouldn't they? I'll set things in order right away."

He took the bolt off of the door, peering out of the window beside the door as he did so. They heard him draw in his breath sharply.

"Douse that glim!" he hissed. Quick as a flash Don raised the lantern and blew out the light.

Hughes bounded back to them. "I should have had you boys start out of the window before I took the bolt off," he explained rapidly. "Odell is right at the door now. The only chance we got is up in the hayloft. Scuttle up there and keep mighty quiet about it!"

CHAPTER XXIII

A BRUSH WITH THE ENEMY

WITH rapidly beating hearts the boys followed Luke up into the hayloft, taking care not to make any noise. They gained that shelter just as the door of the barn was shaken and a key rattled in the lock.

"I forgot about it bein' locked on the outside," Luke whispered. "That gave us a breathing spell."

The sound of the door being opened now came to them and someone walked into the barn. It was an easy matter for the boys, guided by Luke, to look over the edge of the door in the floor through which the hay was thrown down to the horses. Whoever had come into the barn had not as yet struck a light, so they could not make out who it was. But after

a moment's pause they heard a match scratched and James Odell's stern face showed up briefly on a black background.

Odell reached up toward the very beam from which Don had originally taken the lantern and found it missing. Don had dropped it back of a stall on his way upstairs. Odell looked puzzled and called out.

"Barry!" he said.

His son came into the barn. "What do you want?" he asked, ungraciously.

"Do you know what became of the lantern that was hanging on the nail here?" the senior Odell demanded.

"No. It was there when we went out," his son replied.

"That's what I thought. Well, it is gone now. Humph!" He appeared to think deeply for a moment. "Perhaps some of the boys used it!"

"Perhaps," agreed his son. "Maybe they left it in the storage room."

"If they did I'll have something to tell 'em that won't be pleasant," growled the former mate. "Go into the carriage room and get me the other one."

Barry departed in silence to do as his father had ordered him and reappeared soon afterward with

another lantern. His father lighted it and looked all around, his eyes puckered.

"When I came in here it seemed to me like I smelled an oil lamp burning," he said. "Let us hope that no one has been in here."

His son grinned. "You are getting jumpy, Pa," he returned. "Wait until I lock the door and we'll go down in the vault."

Barry Odell went and carefully locked the door leading out into the yard. This operation did not cause the watchers in the loft any great misgivings, for the bolt was on the inside and easy to throw open at a single touch. When he had finished this task the younger Odell joined his father.

"Now, lend a hand here," the former mate directed, and they began to toss the bags of oats to one side. When this had been completed they pulled back the trap and went down, flashing the lantern before them.

"Hadn't we better make a break for it?" Don whispered to Luke.

"No," returned the sailor. "We couldn't all get by them without their knowing it, and besides, I want to see what they do. When they have cleared the barn we'll go out the back window. Listen!"

James Odell was speaking. "All here, and in good

order. Now, it is time we got this stuff moving faster. Suppose you drive over to town tomorrow and tell Number 5 to see that it gets to headquarters as soon as possible."

"All right," agreed the son. "You want me to take over a bolt, eh?"

"I want you to take over two bolts. Here! What is this?"

"He has found something!" whispered Douglas, anxiously. Barry Odell's voice reached them.

"It is only the heel off a shoe, Pa."

"Only!" sputtered Odell. "Don't you realize what that means?"

Luke groaned softly as he felt of his shoe. "That's off my hoof!" he told them.

"What's it mean?" Barry asked.

"It means that someone else has been in this vault beside the men! You know very well that the men from the launch are under orders to wear rubber boots at all times. I told you that someone had been in this place that didn't belong here!"

"By gosh, I guess you are right," the son agreed. "Do you think that sailor, Luke Hughes, is hanging around."

"That is just what I do think," responded the voice of James Odell, from the vault. "I'll tell you

what, I've had enough of that fellow. Tomorrow I'm going to go over to town, get out a posse and have that rascal run down!"

"Listen who is calling me a rascal!" chuckled Hughes.

"Better get on the jump right away and see if he is anywhere around, Pa," suggested Barry. "Got your rattler?"

"Yes. Have you yours?"

Mine's up back of the stall, in a secret pocket. Is your fully loaded?"

"Yes," said the father. "Come on up."

"The rattler is evidently a revolver," said Jim. "What do we do now?"

"Hanged if I know," murmured Hughes. "I was all for fighting that outfit, but if we can get away without doing it I want to. As long as they are armed I'll have to fire first, and I don't care to do it. If it gets that bad, though, I'll protect you boys."

The Odells had emerged from the vault, the rays from the lantern flashing around the barn. While the senior was replacing the trap door Barry, who had been glancing around, set up a shout.

"Look, Pa, there is a back window open!" he announced.

Together they went to examine it. "Somebody has

been in here, because they put this box in place for a getaway," the smuggler said. "Barry, they may be somewhere around or they may come back, You wait here until I get Chris and Pete and then we'll go looking for them."

"You won't be gone long, will you, Pop?" the boy asked, nervously.

"No, only a couple of minutes. Keep your revolver in your hand and shoot the first strange person you see. When I get the servants we'll be four and armed, so we ought to be able to hold our own if anyone should pop up."

With that the senior Odell was gone, leaving his son standing alone in the middle of the floor of the barn. Barry was obviously ill at ease, and held his gun at instant attention. The situation was now serious and the watchers in the hayloft knew it. They gathered closer to Luke to talk it over.

"We can't stay to face four guns," whispered Hughes, anxiously. "We might have some chance against two, but not against four."

"Let's drop something on his head," suggested Terry.

Hughes gripped his arm. "Good idea! I'll drop on him myself! You fellows bolt for the stairs and out the back window the minute I let go!"

Barry was wandering around uneasily, and Hughes poised himself with all muscles set above the doorway. Once the boy below wandered almost under the hay vent and then wandered away, while the boys held their breath. At last, to their relief, he did walk directly below them. Hughes took a deep breath and fairly flew through the opening toward the head and shoulders of the unsuspecting boy.

He landed with crushing force on the boy below, knocking him flat. The revolver clattered across the hard floor and Barry Odell grunted in fright. The boys had wasted no time, but on the instant that Luke jumped they were thudding down the stairs and racing across the barn for the back window. Odell had fallen on his face, and before he could cry out or look to see who had hit him Luke seized his head and kept his nose pressed against the floor while the four boys hustled through the window like streaks. Luke's hand covered the boy's mouth, preventing him from calling out, and when Douglas had disappeared over the window sill Luke jumped up, secured Barry's gun and followed through the window, just as the back door of the Odell house closed with a slam.

Now Barry Odell found his voice and he fairly

shrieked. His father and two big servants appeared at the door, revolvers in hand. Odell's son presented a sorry sight. His clothing was mussed up, his face dirty and one lip was cut and bleeding slightly. Besides that he was frightened, bewildered, and ready to cry.

"What is the matter? What happened?" James shouted.

"Somebody jumped on me from the loft, knocked me down and took my gun," whimpered Barry, shaking all over. "He went through that window."

"You would be fool enough to stand right under the hay vent, wouldn't you?" shouted his father, hotly. "Was it Luke Hughes?"

"I don't know," cried the son. "It sounded like a whole bunch of men. Whoever it was kept my face down so I couldn't see."

James Odell turned to his men. "Scatter out back and look sharp," he snapped. "Shoot straight, if you don't want to go to prison!"

The three men ran around the barn and crashed their way into the bushes. There was no sound and they paused, uncertain.

The four boys and Luke Hughes had allowed no grass to grow under their feet. Although he had been last through the window the old seaman did

not stay in the rear. He caught up with them quickly, his revolver in one hand and Barry's in another.

"Which one of you can shoot?" he asked.

"All of us, but Don is the best marksman," Jim panted.

Hughes thrust the revolver into Don's hand. "Don't shoot unless you have to, but if you do, shoot 'em in the legs," he ordered. "Now follow me, and don't make any more noise than you have to."

With that order Luke began to run up the side of a steep sand dune, the boys following. They had expected to return to the cottage, but Luke apparently had no such thought in mind. He led them up and down sand dunes, in a direction away from the ocean and into a country of beach grass and stunted trees. Behind them they could hear the sound of running footsteps.

One more long sand hill was climbed and then Luke led them down the opposite slope to the opposite end of a gulley. At the end of this little valley they found a small hut, built under some hanging grass and effectively screened from view. Luke threw open the door and they entered a single room. Once inside they became perfectly still, breathing heavily.

"They'll never find us here," the sailor told them, with confidence.

"We hope not," returned Terry, gravely. "For it is a perfect trap. If they ever got into line with this place we wouldn't have a chance."

In this the red-head was correct. From above and from a straight line they would be at the mercy of the attackers. But Hughes was not alarmed.

"You can't see this place in the daylight, let alone in the night," he said. "This is where I have been hanging out for the last few weeks. If they did stumble across us we'd just have to outshoot 'em, that is all."

A sudden medley of shots rang out on the still air. The sound came from the left of them and Hughes chuckled.

"They must have thought they saw us," he said.

"Either that, or they shot at some innocent person," Don suggested, gravely.

"No innocent person would be walkin' around the dunes at this hour of the night," returned Hughes. "I don't think they'll repeat that, because they won't want the life-savers on their heels."

Some time passed without further sound and the boys were sure that everything was satisfactory. Douglas suggested that they make a break for the

cottage, but Luke opposed it for the time being.

"I know its no fun hanging around, but we'll have to give them another hour to get back to bed," he cautioned. "Don't forget, Jimmie Odell is hot after my scalp, and he won't give up the search easily. Better be safe than sorry."

"Confound another hour!" muttered Terry, impatiently. "I'm——"

A voice called out close to them, and the boys felt suddenly cold. They held their breath, and the sailor and Don gripped their guns.

"Going any further, cap'n?" a strange voice inquired, almost overhead.

"I guess it isn't any use, boys," growled Odell, from the other side of the dune. "We can't spend all night looking around these dunes. Probably the man headed for town, anyway. Where is Pete?"

"Here I am," responded another voice.

"Is Barry with us?" Odell asked.

"No, went back to the house," one of the men answered.

"All right, the whole mess is his fault," snarled Odell. "Now, listen, this Luke Hughes has got to be caught. If it was lighter I wouldn't give up until we had uncovered him, but we'll never find him at this time of night. Tomorrow, after Barry has run a

couple of bolts up to Number 5 I want you fellows to get a couple of friends and we'll go for this Hughes in dead earnest. Remember, when you see him, it is no time wasted in talking. Shoot him down and keep your mind closed about it! We can put him out of sight under one of these hills and no one will ever be the wiser. Do you understand me?"

"Sure, cap'n," said the men, together.

"Then come on back. No telling what might be going on while we are gone."

Those hiding in the shack heard the sounds of the retreating men as they made their way across the sand toward the barn. Nothing was said until they were sure that there would not be any danger.

"Boy, that was one narrow squeak!" breathed Jim.

"It certainly was, with a character like Odell," responded Don. "Well, they certainly have it in for you, Mr. Hughes. Talking about hiding your body under the sand!"

"They'd do it, too, in a minute," returned the former second mate, grimly. "I wouldn't put nothin' past Jimmie Odell." He chuckled suddenly. "By the way, Jimmie has come up in the world. When he was shippin' he was a mate. Now I notice that these lads called him cap'n."

They waited until they were reasonably sure that the other party had returned to the house and then they left the shack, but not before Luke Hughes had dug down into the sand near the door. To do so he lighted a match and the boys saw that they were in a tiny one-room place not much bigger than a small chicken coop. From under the loose sand Luke took out a flat metal case that he had run away with in the barn.

"Here are the papers to the Hazlett house," he announced. "Pretty soon we'll spring 'em on Jimmie Odell. Let's get up to your house, young fellow."

They left the shelter of the sand dune cautiously, and made their way across country with watchful eyes. No one was encountered on the way and when they approached the darkened cottage Luke slowed them up.

"From now on we must look sharp," he said. "Maybe those fellows are watching the cottage to see if you boys have been out. I know that they think I am in this thing alone, but they may have gotten another idea in their heads, so look alive."

But a careful look all around the grounds failed to reveal anyone lurking. Evidently the Odells did believe that Luke, and Luke alone, was concerned in the night's events. They went to the back door

and Douglas let them in with his key. Once in the kitchen they pulled down the shades, locked the door, and saw to it that the door leading out into the dining room and the hall was closed. Then they had a council of war.

"I think we had better get Odell up here and flash our proofs on him at once," Don advised.

"I guess that is about the best thing to do, boys," agreed Hughes. "But first we have got to capture this Number 5 who takes the bolts of silk over in Marietta."

"Maybe they won't send any over tomorrow, now that they know you are in on their game," suggested Terry.

"I think they are only too anxious to get rid of the stuff, and that they'll go right through with it," Hughes thought. "You remember that they said I was the one to get? That means they don't know a thing about you boys, and while I remain in hiding here tomorrow you boys can go up to Marietta and see where that silk goes to."

"Don't you think we had better call my father in at once?" Douglas asked. Hughes nodded.

"Yes, we'll get hold of him first thing in the morning. Odell knows that we are onto his game and he will play with his weather eye open for

trouble. The reason I say we must get this Number 5 is because if we don't lay hands on him mighty quickly he'll slip away from us. I think Odell is safe, because he calculates to take me and put me out of the way."

"He must know that he is playing a slippery game," commented Jim. "How does he know but what you are up in Marietta right now, telling your story to the chief of police?"

"He knows there is a chance of that happening," nodded Hughes. "Boys, I bet you anything you want to name that Odell and his men are transferring that silk to some other hideaway right this minute, so that if I turned up with the sheriff he could claim I was crazy!"

"Well, in the morning we'll see Dad about the whole affair," broke in Douglas. "I don't think we have any bed made up for you, Luke, so how will it do to bunk on the sofa for the night?"

"Just give me an overcoat to cover up with," nodded Hughes, and this was done.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HAZLETTS GO HOME

THE ladies discovered Luke Hughes asleep on the sofa the following morning and were more than curious. When the boys came down they were still discussing it.

"We were a bit worried last night," explained Grandma. "We heard some shooting and we knew that you boys were out. You didn't get into any trouble, did you?"

"No," replied Douglas. "But there are big doings in the wind, Grandma. And we will need your help, too."

"Mercy me! What help can I give you?"

Douglas brought a pen and a bottle of ink from the desk. He placed these before the grandmother and then gave her a sheet of paper and an envelope.

"Please write a note to James Odell, telling him to come here tonight. Tell him that you have some questions to ask him about vacating the place."

"My, my," murmured the old lady, after a stare. "I am having more excitement in my old age than I ever did have! But I'll write the note."

"Is there something really exciting going to happen?" Martha whispered to Terry, while the grandmother wrote the note.

"It will be exciting for someone," promised Terry, grimly.

The old lady took up the note and Douglas read it over her shoulder. "That is fine, Grandma," he approved. "Luke, you keep out of sight, while I go down and hunt up Dad. Aunt Laura, we'll want to have a secret pow-wow with Dad over something important, so don't mind if we shut the door. Tonight you ladies will know a few things that will surprise you."

When Douglas had persuaded his father to come up to the cottage they went into the parlor, closed the door, and placed the entire matter before him. The captain was astonished and aroused.

"We'll have to land these fellows at once," he declared. "You boys get over to Marietta and tell the sheriff the whole business. As a matter of fact, I'll go with you. Then we'll land this Number 5 man and arrest Odell."

"We don't want Odell arrested until we show him

our full hand, Captain Douglas," Hughes said. "We have only told you half of the story. Let me tell the rest."

Luke told the story of the flat case from the sunken reef and showed them the deed to the property down the hill. To say that the coast guard captain was astonished would hardly describe his feeling.

"By thunder mighty!" he shouted. "That beats anything I ever head of!" He grasped Hughes by the hand and shook it heartily.

"Do you think your evidence sufficient to convict Odell?" Don asked, quietly.

"Why, with this deed we can turn him right out of the place," said Hughes.

Don turned to Jim. "Will you go upstairs and get the letter, Jim? It is in the drawer of the highboy." As Jim hastened from the room Don went on. "Odell can say that he accidentally dropped the case overboard and that a lawyer gave him the deed to that property by mistake. How will you catch him there?"

"Well, we won't be able to catch him," Hughes admitted. Jim returned, bearing the letter which Don had found on the *Rosa Mulholland*.

"Fortunately, I have something here which will

convict him without a shadow of doubt," Don said, and he told his interested listeners how he had broken into the desk with the axe. "Now, listen, while I read you a paragraph that Herman Gott wrote to Odell years ago."

"That finishes the whole business," cried the captain, when he had heard it. "Now I see your plan. We must get Odell up here, show him what we have against him, and then arrest him for smuggling."

"I have arranged for that," the son said, and told how the grandmother had written the note.

"The stage is all set," exulted the captain, rubbing his hands. "One of you boys take that note over to Odell's right away—or better still, we'll send Martha. You boys come with me to Marietta while we get the sheriff on the job."

The captain got out the buggy and the boys piled in, the captain driving. Hughes remained in hiding in the house, and Martha took the note to Odell's house. When she came back she reported that James Odell had promised to visit them that evening.

In the meantime the boys and the captain had driven rapidly to Marietta and had called on the sheriff. He was deeply interested in their story.

"Those fellows must have been pulling the wool over our eyes for a long time," Sheriff Ward ob-

served. "So Barry Odell is going to drive up to town with a couple of bolts today, is he?"

"Yes," said Don. "And this Number 5 man is going to unload it somehow. I wonder how they do it without anyone getting onto it?"

"I don't know," responded the sheriff. "But I'll have a couple of deputies out to watch for the arrival of young Odell. Then we'll see just what he does with his carriage and see if we can't figure it out."

The two deputies were sent out and in less than an hour they had a report. Barry Odell had come into town in a carriage and had left it at the local blacksmith shop. The boy was now over at the hotel playing billiards. One of the deputies had learned that Odell played billiards at least once a week, and each time he did so he left his carriage at the blacksmith shop.

The sheriff nodded with satisfaction. "I guess we have our Number 5 man," he told his visitors. "It is plain as day now. He drives up, leaves the carriage there, the blacksmith takes the roll of silk out, and when Barry goes back after his pool or billiards game he simply drives back home. So simple that no one would ever think of looking that way for it."

"Do you want us to touch young Odell?" a deputy asked.

"No," ordered the sheriff. "Let him go back without suspecting anything. As soon as we think it is safe we'll arrest the blacksmith. Just see to it that the blacksmith doesn't slip out of town, that is all."

"Is the blacksmith an old-timer?" Jim asked.

"No, he has only lived here for the past six months. He took over the business when a man named Souer died. Now, what is your plan for taking Odell?"

They told him of the events which they had planned for the night, and the sheriff nodded in approval. When they had agreed on all details they left his office and went back to the cottage. Captain Douglas went back to the station.

That evening all of the family, Luke, the captain and the sheriff from Marietta sat around the living room of the Hazlett cottage waiting for James Odell to pay them a visit. The ladies were sorely puzzled but did their best to keep patient under the trial. Only the men knew that the two deputies were at Odell's place, hidden to watch and see that he came and that he did not try to slip away in the night. The assembled company had been talking for

more than an hour, when there was a heavy knock on the back door.

Luke and the sheriff got up and promptly left the room, going into the dining room and partly closing the door. Captain Douglas himself went to the door and ushered James Odell in. Apparently the former mate felt no apprehensions, for none showed on his face.

"Good evening, Mrs. Hazlett," he greeted the grandmother, who returned his salutation and invited him to sit down. When he had done so he opened the conversation at once.

"What is it you wished to see me about?" he asked. "You wanted to ask me some questions about vacating, I believe."

The grandmother looked helpless and the captain cleared his throat. "I guess I can speak for all hands, Odell," he announced. "I just wanted to ask you this: have you any idea where we are going when we do leave this house?"

"Certainly not!" snapped Odell. "Why should I? That isn't my business, Captain Douglas."

"Suppose I was to tell you that when we move out of this cottage—which will be very soon—we are going to move right into the house that you are

living in?" pursued the captain, evenly. The ladies started and Odell glared in amazement.

"Why, you can't do any such thing!" Odell cried. "That is my house!"

"Mr. Odell," said Captain Douglas, coldly. "That isn't your house and you know it! Captain Clifford Hazlett handed a case containing the deed to that house to Luke Hughes on the night the *Rose Hazlett* went down. You knocked that case out of Luke's hand and evidently dropped the case or threw it overboard in the mud at the bottom of the sea, for only a week or so ago a diver found that case with the deed to the estate down the hill in it!"

The ladies cried out in a chorus. Odell's eyes bulged. "It's a lie!" he shouted.

"Luke!" called out the captain, raising his voice.

Luke Hughes walked calmly into the room with the case in his hand. At sight of him Odell drew in his breath with a sharp hiss.

"How do you do, Jimmie?" greeted Hughes, with a steelly glitter in his dark eyes. "You're well, I trust?"

"What are you doing here, you—you jail-bird?" roared Odell.

"I am here to show you the deed which Clifford Hazlett handed to me and which you took out of my

hands on the night of the wreck," Hughes said. From a safe distance he opened the case, displaying the deed to the property.

"Well, you can't hold that against me," muttered Odell, wiping the sweat from his forehead. "I thought Hazlett handed that case to me, and I pushed you overboard trying to get it. But I dropped it accidentally and it went to the bottom of the sea. Anyway, the whole thing was a lawyer's mistake, because one of them gave me a deed to the place and told me it was mine, and that Clifford owned the stretch of sand below the estate."

"You are sure of that, Odell?" the coast guard captain asked, keenly.

"Absolutely. It seems that I have made a wretched mistake, but it isn't my fault," the mate said, humbly.

"I see," nodded the captain. "Now, Don, suppose you tell us your story."

Don told of breaking in on the desk aboard the *Rosa Mulholland* and of finding the letter. He read the passage which Herman Gott had written to Odell and the last link of the chain had tightened around the dishonest man. He was crushed and desperate.

"That is a joke," he roared. "There is no such person as Herman Gott!"

"Not now, Mr. Odell," replied Don. "I took a trip to Boston to find out, and I learned that he had just died. Then I went to see Daniel Parnes, and learned a lot there."

Odell threw caution to the winds. "Why, that snake of a lawyer!" he shouted, his face red. "He is just as guilty as I am! He was paid a big price to make out my deed to the property. If I go to prison so will he!"

"We aren't going to send you to prison, Mr. Odell," returned the captain. "All we are going to do is to tell you that instead of this family vacating, you must vacate our rightful home for us!"

"It is going to be fearful for me!" sighed the man, abjectly. The captain's eyes flashed.

"Yes, I imagine so!" he snorted. "When did you ever think of Mrs. Hazlett like that, may I ask?"

The man reached for his hat. "I'm all broken up over this unfortunate thing. May I go?"

"As far as we are concerned, yes," replied the captain. "But there is someone in the dining room who wants you."

"Who is it?" cried Odell, a look of alarm in his eyes.

The sheriff appeared at the door instantly. "I want you for smuggling, Odell," he said.

Things happened swiftly. Odell dashed for the door with surprising speed but landed on his face just outside of the kitchen door. Luke Hughes had thrust out his foot and the man went down in a heap. After that there was no fight left in Odell. The ladies had screamed but quieted down immediately. The sheriff took Odell away and the captain helped him.

When the captain came back a torrent of talk followed. Stories had to be told over again. The ladies were stunned at the change in their fortunes and the lights in the Hazlett cottage, which were generally out by ten o'clock, burned that night until well past midnight. The news seemed too wonderful to be true.

"My, my," beamed the grandmother. "Don't God work things out wonderful!"

"It is a fitting reward for a courage like yours," returned Don, quietly.

Barry Odell was arrested soon afterward and he and his father were punished to the full extent of the law. The black launch slipped into the dock one night soon afterward and the crew was captured after a little harmless gun play. In time the whole combine was taken in by the law, and it was found that James Odell was the head of a big smuggling

outfit. With his capture it went to pieces and the local authorities received rewards, some of which went to the boys and Luke Hughes.

Those in the cottage were busy now. Things were packed up and early in April the Hazlett family moved down the hill into the home which was really their own. The place had previously been cleaned out and was ready for them. It was a happy day for the grandmother, and although she never showed any signs of weakness in times of danger or sorrow the tears ran down her face as she stood in the hall of the big house and looked around her. Memories of the loving husband who had built it for her, and who had spent a few and all too short days in it, crowded upon her.

"We'll make it a real, sanctified home from now on," she promised.

The boys were able to spend only a week with their kind friends. Douglas got a letter soon after they had moved into the place and he read it in silence. Then he addressed his chums.

"We are ordered back to the school on the 15th of April," he told them.

"I've been expecting that right along," Don nodded.

Luke Hughes became a permanent member of

the household and remained there to the end of his days. When the time came for the boys to leave the ladies were sincerely sorry and so was Captain Douglas.

"I don't know what we should have done without you fine boys," Grandma Hazlett said.

"Great boys," agreed the captain, warmly. "I could certainly make dandy coast guards out of them."

Terry seemed to be the least ready to leave the place. He and Martha spent the last hours together and the boys overheard him promise to write to her. When they finally did drive away from the house he was unusually silent.

Douglas parted with them at the station, promising to meet them again at school. While they waited for a train the four chums talked things over.

"Thanks to you, we had a dandy vacation," Jim told Douglas.

"Yes, it was an interesting one," Douglas admitted. "I suppose we won't have any fun like it again."

"Oh, don't be too sure of that," Don put in. "Don't forget that we go on our first summer encampment with the cadet corps this year. We may run into some fun then."

Don was right in that statement. What adventures befell them while on their summer encampment will be told at length in the sixth volume of this series, *THE MERCER BOYS IN SUMMER CAMP, OR LAYING THE GHOST OF RUSTLING RIDGE*.

Before the train pulled in Terry went to the candy counter in the station and purchased a large box of candy. With a perfectly grave face he presented it to Douglas.

"Is this for me?" Douglas asked, in pretended surprise. "Oh, thank you so much, Terry!"

"My friend," returned Terry, solemnly. "You are merely the messenger in this particular instance. You will please to deliver this in intact to one of the fairest flowers that Nature has caused to bloom on the whole coast of Massachusetts! In the near future I expect to have communication with this flower, and if you do not wish to descend in deepest infamy into an unknown and unmarked grave, unwept and unsung, do not fail to deliver this box to the party to whom it is respectfully and humbly consigned!"

THE END

